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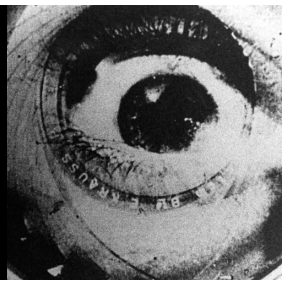

Anne Nesbet

Understanding *Man with a Movie Camera*

THE CENTERPIECE of the 23rd Pordenone Silent Film Festival was a glorious retrospective: just about every extant film made by Dziga Vertov. It was partly to trouble our comfortable assumption that we already know a thing or two about Vertov that University of Chicago film historian Yuri Tsivian undertook this mammoth project, which involved bringing hundreds of films (and a few rare manuscripts) to Sacile, Italy, in October 2004.

With his customary dry wit, Tsivian asks, "Can anyone say one really understands *Man with a Movie Camera*—even if one knows it like the back of one's hand—unless one has seen, say, *Kino-Pravda* No. 18, or *State Kino-Calendar* No. 47?" Having seen all the rare *Kino-Pravdas* (Nos. 1-23) except for the still-missing No. 19; about 20 newsreels from 1918 to 1919; four issues of the *State Kino-Calendar*; all of Vertov's feature-length documentaries from the silent era—and a number of films made by Vertov's rivals, relatives, acquaintances, and admirers—festivalgoers can now try to answer that question.

Following a suggestion made by Aleksandr Deriabin, *State Kino-Calendar* No. 47 (1925) was shown on the same program as *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929). "Poles in top hats; new trains; 100 years Bolshoi," read my notes. The latter theme is the one that Deriabin and Tsivian would have us recall as we watch *Man with a Movie Camera*, in which there is a famous image of the Bolshoi made to collapse in on itself by means of visual tricks (an "implosion" of the outmoded past, as Tsivian points out). But formal experimentation in the earlier newsreel comes chiefly in the form of the juxtaposition of shots taken at ground level with some taken of the crowd from far above, the point-of-view of the famous horse statues that grace the Bolshoi's roof. The meaning of these experiments is in no way as legible as *Man with a Movie Camera*'s "implosion." One might argue, in fact, that the main effect of having *State Kino-Calendar* No. 47 in mind as one views *Man with a Movie Camera* is to underscore the huge *gap* between the 1925 newsreel and the 1929 film, both thematically and stylistically.

Between the basic newsreels and the feature films, however, comes a sort of evolutionary missing link, the astonishing series of experimental *Kino-Pravda* shorts. No. 12 features extraordinary 3-D titles constructed out of wood and paper by Aleksandr Rodchenko. No. 18 sends the camera racing up the Eiffel Tower, flying into a Soviet airport, visiting a House for Workers, and then becomes a photo-essay on the subject of cooperation between workers and countryside, one peasant's trip to the city, and "the movie camera that follows him." Already we have moved—at a clip!—from the technological achievements of the Old World to the construction of the New; this process is then raised to an ecstatic climax in the portrayal of a "Red Baptism," as an infant Soviet receives the blessing of not only a crowd singing the "Internationale" but also a kind of chorus of machines spinning ever faster in his honor.

Here we have the theme of birth that holds an important place at the heart of *Man with a Movie Camera* combined with (earlier versions of) the dizzying montage techniques, self-referentiality, and essayistic cinematic structure we have come to think of as "Vertovian." And yet it is again the amazing *atypicality* of *Man with a Movie Camera* that strikes the viewer: how the choice not to use titles changes the feel and effect of the "essay"; how the baby born in *Man with a Movie Camera* has becomes a relatively universal Everybaby.

If *Man with a Movie Camera* remains an outlier in Dziga Vertov's oeuvre, it is rivalled in interest (if not in sheer aesthetic brilliance) by a number of more rarely seen and more overtly political films. The ideological structure of Vertov's *Shestaia chast' mira* (1926), for example, a visual paean to Gostorg (the State Trade agency), with its attempt to link visually the fates of the "backward nations" incorporated into the Soviet world with the fate of industrial capitalism, reminded me of nothing so much as Eisenstein's unrealized project of filming Marx's *Capital*.

There is something inherently artificial in sitting down to watch "everything Vertov filmed" over the course of a few days. It is a dizzying, even surreal undertaking (certain shots, reappearing many times in many different films, began to feel like old friends), and I have to say it made for one of the most visually exciting weeks of my life. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to the Giornate del Cinema Muto and to Yuri Tsivian for reacquainting us with Dziga Vertov, the poetry of whose *Man with a Movie Camera* can now be appreciated in a newly visible context.

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■ **Russell Merritt**

Lost on Pleasure Islands

Storytelling in Disney's Silly Symphonies

WALT DISNEY, ONE OF THE twentieth century's most potent storytellers, found his storytelling voice in the early 1930s while reworking fairy tales and nursery lore in a series of Silly Symphony shorts. Although he had been making cartoons since 1921, and had been riding the wave of his colossally successful Mickey Mouse one-reelers since the end of the 1920s, his interest in reviving fairy-tale classics only started in 1932, amidst vague ambitions of some day making a cartoon feature. Building on his success with animated dance routines and slapstick comedy gags, he turned his three-year-old Silly Symphony series in a new direction, and in so doing laid the foundation for the narrative formulas that would make him the country's most influential fairy-tale entertainer.

Today, only a handful of the Symphonies are remembered—*Three Little Pigs* certainly, *The Old Mill,* and maybe *Flowers and Trees* and *The Skeleton Dance.* But otherwise these shorts are discussed, when at all, either as forerunners of the famous Disney features, or as the 76 films that ran alongside Mickey Mouse, or as the site of technical innovations like 3-strip Technicolor and the multi-plane camera. The very qualities that made them the Tiffany line of 30s animation—the technical polish, meticulous design, and cultivation of middle-class cultural values—have given them a certain bad repute among critics and fans, who find them bland and moralistic, and prefer the urban brashness and cold-blooded, self-reflexive humor of Warner Brothers and Fleischer one-reelers.

It's time to give them another look. They have several claims to historical importance. At their best, Silly Symphonies combine the manic energy of adventurous apprentice productions with the polish of seasoned craftsmanship. What I want to explore here, though, is how this combination—testing ground and self-assured artwork—holds true not just for the animation and the storytelling, but for the psychological underpinning of the fantasies too. An important part of Disney's unsettling power, I will be arguing, comes from his ability to explore the inner life of the child. What Ellen Handler Spitz in her landmark study, *Inside Picture Books,* writes to explain the importance of books like *The Velveteen Rabbit, The Story of Babar, The Little Engine That Could,* and *Where the Wild Things Are* can be applied to the Disney movies.

> My initial hunch [Spitz writes] is that the popularity of classic picture books derives from their remarkable capacity to tap ongoing issues of deep emotional significance for children. The picture books that become classics do so, I suspect, because they dare to tackle important and abiding psychological themes and because they convey these themes with craftsmanship and subtlety. Musicality, rhyming, visual artistry, humor, surreal juxtapositions, elegance, simplicity and suspense combine in them to construct layers of meaning that reward countless hours of cross-generational reading.[1]

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Poster for an early (1933) narrative Silly Symphony

This is the case I want to make for Disney: that the Sillies tackle "important and abiding psychological themes" which have their roots in the primal fears and pleasures we encounter as children. Much of what Disney explores in the Sillies—the child's sense of shame, issues of separation, the struggle to control impulses, fear of annihilation, and love of adventure—will get developed and refined in *Snow White, Pinocchio, Fantasia, Dumbo,* and *Bambi.* But practically from the start, the Symphonies show a filmmaker using comic images and metaphors to dig deep into the recesses of the children's world.

The most notorious consequences are well known. Anyone who has tried to comfort a young child terrified in the middle of the night by the recollection of a Disney forest fire, fanged wolf, or wicked witch knows

one kind of emotional experience these "enchanted drawings" can create. And anyone who has complained about the wizardlike power these cartoons seem to have in obliterating practically all memory of their classical literary sources is acknowledging, however backhandedly, another kind of spellcraft. My argument will be that we must look beyond historical and marketing forces to explain such potency. I'd like to emphasize instead the importance of their skill in constructing a new, peculiarly American style of reimagining classic tales.

REMAKING FAIRY TALES

Fairy tales and folklore came into Disney's world only in the early 1930s. Before then, his connection with stories like "Puss 'n Boots," "Cinderella" and "Jack and the Beanstalk," which he had turned into cartoon Laugh-O-grams back in Kansas City, had been entirely limited to simple Jazz Age parodies stuffed with gags and puns. As a series of spot gags strung together by loosely constructed plot lines, they were indistinguishable from Disney's other silent cartoons or, for that matter, his early Mickeys and early Symphonies. The great change came in early 1932 with the expanded budgets made possible by the new United Artists contract.

With the shift into Technicolor and high-fidelity RCA sound that the enlarged budgets made possible, Disney started a full-fledged series of musical fairy-tale adaptations. It proved a pivotal turning point. The recasting of fairy-tale classics as playlets with song and dance was itself nothing new. In Europe, Lotte Reiniger and Ladislas Starevich had been doing it for years, and Tony Sarg's cut-out silhouettes from Latin America had been popular in the United States throughout the 1920s. Looked at from one perspective, Disney himself was simply adapting the formulas of American marionette theater, which in turn had been influenced by turn-of-the-century fairyland operettas and stage musicals—most notably the Hamlin-Mitchell stage productions of *The Wizard of Oz* (1902), *Babes in Toyland* (1903), and Fred Thompson's *Little Nemo* (1908). Nor can the drawing, based on the style of American illustrators like Harrison Cady, W.W. Denslow, and John R. Neill, be considered original art. But in the world of commercial American cartoons, no one had seen anything like it.

The anarchy of the early Symphonies suddenly gave way to tales with strong moral tones. In films like *Birds in the Spring, Lullaby Land,* and *The Flying Mouse,* Disney used nursery tales to explore feelings of loneliness and abandonment as infants got lost and explored strange new worlds. In his fairy tales, too, Disney expanded his repertoire of frightfulness, moving into the fairy Guignol of witches, wolves, bears, and bogeymen. The best of them resonated with rich mythic overtones; historians have found, particularly in *Three Little Pigs, Father Noah's Ark,* and *Babes in the Woods,* open-ended metaphors for coping with the Great Depression. We can likewise trace Disney's growing fascination with sharply individualized character animation back to this cluster of films too.

The most famous of them—arguably the most famous cartoon short ever made—is *Three Little Pigs,* released in May 1933. But the most ambitious and the one most saturated in fairy lore is the one that started the cycle six months earlier, *Babes in the Woods.*[2] Like *Three Little Pigs, Babes* was directed by Burt Gillett. And like *Three Little Pigs, Babes* avoided modernizing or teasing the material in the familiar manner of the silent Disney Laugh-O-grams. Nor would the cartoon take its lead from the ethereal Art Nouveau styles of Lotte Reiniger and Tony Sarg, who worked within the languorous fine arts tradition of illustrated classic stories. Instead, Disney and Gillett invented a unique cartoon vernacular adapted from early twentieth-century American storybook illustration.

As a tale of children in mortal danger, *Babes in the Woods* is striking for the absence of any parental figure or any sense of stable home. Instead, the rescuing figures are elderly dwarfs—playful idlers who form a folk army to rescue the two children from their nemesis, a wicked witch. In so doing, the dwarfs enable the babes to liberate a colony of other children also imprisoned by the witch, and these children immediately become playmates. The cartoon ends with dwarfs, children, and singing birds blended into a joyful cluster of unsupervised orphans and child-like old men: safe, self-contained, and hermetically sealed off from the outside world. In this, his first fully developed fairy-tale cartoon, Disney strikes a theme that will thread its way through even his most sentimental Symphonies. Parents are never uncontested guardians of their children. They constantly vie with these substitute, pretend families, usually of the child's own making, for the child's loyalty. In *Babes in the Woods,* parents never appear at all, and even when they do show up in later Symphonies, they are almost always ineffectual, incidental, or unnecessary. In *Babes,* the dwarfs and the children themselves undergo all the dangers and fun of rescue, so an ending where the children get to play all day with their woodland rescuers feels particularly appropriate and satisfying.

Above all, what *Babes* reveals is how nimble Disney is in weaving motifs from a broad assortment of

sources. Characteristic of the Sillies is how in the course of adapting a single story, Disney will strike chords from many, many others. Here the Hansel and Gretel story is combined with rescuing dwarfs framed inside a Just-So ballad about the origins of a stone formation called "Witch Rock." But by the time the cartoon is done, we've had glancing references to everything from "Rip Van Winkle," "Snow White," and *Il Trovatore* to Victor Herbert operetta, Universal horror movies, and a pastiche of vaudeville, burlesque, and silent comedy routines.

What binds the movie together is a deceptively simple circular structure in which the second part of the tale inverts the first, and the whole story ends where it began. Two children are lost in the woods, dark and spooky. But the frights are not what they seem. The silhouettes of monster trees break up to reveal that they are no more than composites of frightened birds, butterflies, and withered, inert stumps. Revelation, however, brings no relief to the terrified boy and girl. A strong wind howls, the children push forward, and forced to their knees, they crawl to an opening in the woods where they discover a sunlit village of merry dwarfs. The dwarfs collect the children and entertain them with eccentric dances. A second gust of wind, even more terrifying than the first, breaks this all up and takes us to Part Two.

The wind comes from the broom tail of a flying witch, who descends on her stick and acts as a second deliverer. She whisks the children off to a house made of dripping pastries; the children register delight, only to discover they have been kidnapped, plunged into a dungeon even darker than the woods they originally entered. Once again, they confront monsters—red-eyed lizards, bats, rodents, and spiders. And once again, these are false demons, in actuality frightened children who have been transformed into scary-looking vermin, imprisoned in crates and chained to walls. And once again, dwarfs come to the rescue. Liberated from the witch's spell, the children turn the tables on her and plunge her into her own toxic brew, whereupon she morphs into a harmless rock. Properly revealed, the birds and butterflies which inadvertently frightened the babes at the start preside over a thoroughly pacified wood as a properly revealed chorus of children dances and cheers.

Disney has done more than sweeten the Grimm source; it can be argued that, thematically, he has turned the fairy tale on its head. The Grimm version is a paradigm text for the terrors of starvation and the dread of being eaten alive. For the Grimms, food becomes synonymous with survival. Parents abandon children because there is not enough at home to eat; a bird eats up bread crumbs, preventing Hansel and Gretel from returning home; a witch captures Hansel to eat him, and she herself is baked alive when Gretel tricks her into entering the oven meant for the children.

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The final image in *Babes in the Woods*

The Disney version is striking not for the unsurprising abandonment of the cannibalism motif, but for transforming a story about hunger and edible desire into one where food has been objectified entirely as gooey play. The succoring dwarfs entertain themselves in many ways, making beer an important part of their day. But food is no part of their diet, nor part of the hospitality they show the children. And when food does come into play, it is used entirely to create messes. The witch's famous gingerbread house has been redesigned as a melting pastry cottage where the babes succumb to uncontrolled cravings, smearing forbidden fruit pies on their hands and faces. The same food later besmirches the witch as, recycling the silent comedy tradition of the custard pie, the dwarfs hurl the pastries as though they were weapons. In this regard, the food relates to the witch's potions, with their overtones of foul, sticky medicine. The witch pours her potion out of a medicine bottle, begriming the boy before he turns into a spider. She hurls a ladle full of goo from her kettle over an obstreperous cat that, caked in the brown sludge, congeals and cracks. In her own case, the goo in her kettle turns her into rock.

The children are threatened not by starvation nor by being eaten, but by enslavement and transformation into unclean insects and reptiles. This will become a leitmotif in the Sillies, where Disney will repeatedly play up the pubertal loathsomeness of growing hairy, developing appendages, and bulging out of clothes that

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The witch's monstrous victims in *Babes in the Woods*

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Soup as medicine syrup in *The Grasshopper and the Ants*

no longer fit. An important part of the humiliating descent into verminhood is that self-rescue is impossible. Inevitably, the victim is dependent upon others, who ultimately enable him to shrink back into shapes and clothes that fit. The Sillies will also continue to connect food with besmirching and defilement, almost never linking it to nourishment (the closest Disney gets is the end of *The Golden Touch*, when King Midas, released from the curse that makes food inedible, sinks his teeth into a dripping, juicy hamburger).

Overwhelmingly, food connotes unsightly needs. The Disney adaptation of that other paradigmatic devouring fable, "Little Red Riding Hood," is especially revealing. The Disney version, a sequel to the *Three Little Pigs* called *The Big Bad Wolf,* has no interest whatever in the food the heroine brings grandma ("cakes and wine") and transforms the wolf's edible interest in the girl ("O Grandma! What a big mouth you've got!") into a leering burlesque routine, complete with a direct-to-camera Bert Savoy imitation. Food only takes stage center at the end, when Practical Pig stuffs un-popped popcorn with hot coals down the wolf's baggy pants. The wolf excretes the popcorn all over the path as he makes his howling retreat into the woods. Nor do rescued Symphony characters often celebrate by feasting, but sing, dance, and play instead. Even *The Grasshopper and the Ants* makes the feeding of the starving, foolish grasshopper (rendered as spoon-feeding him an antiseptic anti-cold syrup) subordinate to a foot-stomping hoedown.

But—back to *Babes in the Woods*—arguably the most suggestive aspect of the film is its spatial structure. In this, his first full-blown fairy-tale narrative, Disney has established the geographic formula that will give even his most banal narratives a curious tension. The setting itself is whimsical real estate borrowed directly from Harrison Cady, a source Disney would continue to mine throughout the Symphony period. An important part of it is the ingeniously designed domicile—pumpkin homes that resemble collapsible trailers, tree apartments with leaf-welcome mats, and the like. Anyone who has seen Cady's Beetleburgh cartoons or his Peter Rabbit strip that ran through the *New York Herald Tribune* for almost 30 years will recognize where this cozy world of bugs, birds, and small animals comes from. Disney's trails and woodland pathways are rendered in the same style: background strips that suggest a stable, non-threatening middle ground. As such, they often provide a soothing counterpoint to violent foreground activities (a wolf pursuing pigs; dwarfs battling a witch) and bland, non-distracting backgrounds to the comic songs and dances.

Characters don't penetrate this space, they move laterally across it. And the space itself has been structured in a deceptively simple way. A long scroll-like pathway is bordered at either end by anchors: a permanent home at one end where the child's family or its surrogate resides, and at the other a counter-home. The counter-home can be sinister, like the witch's cottage, a bat or devil's cave, a hornet's nest, a wolf's den, or a highwayman's lair. Alternatively, it can be a sanctuary from an oppressive or endangered home. The children in *The Pied Piper* cross a countryside bordered on the one side by the apartments of selfish, exploitative parents and on the other by a parent-free magic mountain where they can play. Noah and his animals cross an ocean bounded by an endangered homeland and a brave new world. Or finally, the setting can be terrain

with two equivalent terminal points: an ocean that separates rival kingdoms or, in the case of *The Big Bad Wolf,* a forest bound by two cottages—Grandma's at one end, Practical Pig's at the other.

But however marked, this kind of configuration remains remarkably constant in Disney shorts. Part of the critical enjoyment is to see how many variations of this pattern Disney can plot; another pleasure is to see where the formula leads. *Snow White* literally starts and ends with two castles at the opposite edges of a forest where, as in *Babes in the Woods,* the dwarf cottage provides a counter-home to the wicked queen's domain. *Pinocchio,* the most amazing structural contraption Disney ever designed, simply builds on the Symphony formula. As film historian William Paul noticed, Geppetto's workshop is the first of four stations or terminals—Stromboli's wagon, Pleasure Island, and Monstro's belly are the others—that introduce a new male authority figure, each of whom is more menacing than the last. The settings, static and monumental, mark the sites of adventures that develop "through a clear escalation in terror." [3]

This structure naturally invites stories about quests, searches, pursuits, explorations, running away, or getting lost and found. The tension is between the stability of the terminal points and the uncertain, transitional roadways. In most Symphonies, the road is everything: a path through woods filled with risks, frights, and marvels. But as the Symphonies deepen and darken, it is, curiously, the terminals rather than the dark, creepy woods that grow in complexity, subsuming self-contradictory values filled with internal tension. We'll see a little later how this works out with *Mother Pluto* and the remake of *The Ugly Duckling.*[4]

Lullaby Land (released August 1933) is, like *Babes in the Woods,* another tale with a home/woods/anti-home spatial structure embedded within a narrative frame, and it works as a variation of the earlier film. Here it is Mother who frames the adventure by tending to her baby as the little one drifts off to sleep. The singing chorus in *Babes* is reconfigured as a mother's maternal spirit hovering over the dream in the voice of a lulling female trio. The trio sings words of reassurance, advice, and caution as Baby makes its perilous journey across a dream landscape called the Land of Nowhere.

The Land of Nowhere is our forest redressed in toddler imagery (it is also the first of the countrysides, followed by *Music Land, The Cookie Carnival,* and *Who Killed Cock Robin?* given thematic décor), bordered by one terminal (the Forbidden Garden) where the child is threatened with bodily harm and even annihilation,

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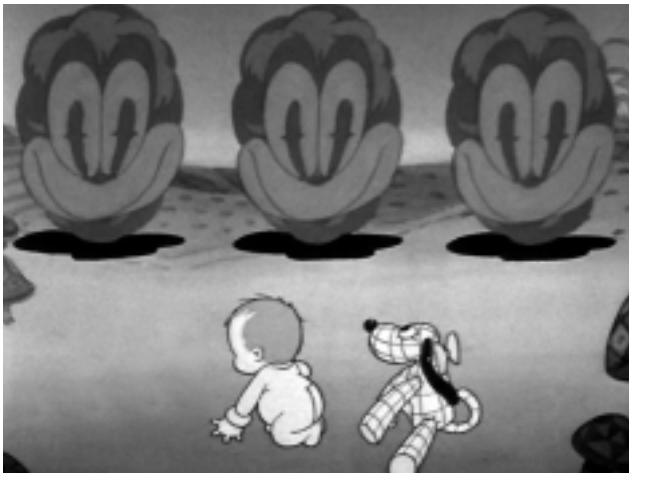
Sandman sings Baby and Calico Dog to sleep under a Nipple Bottle Tree in *Lullaby Land*.

and by another (a clearing under a Nipple Bottle Tree) where the child is serenaded by a ministering father figure, the Sandman.

Inside the Forbidden Garden, the baby interacts with dangerous, sharp objects like razor blades and knives, is chased by flaming matches, then warned away by three playful bogeymen. Safe at the other edge of the wood, Baby is lulled out of this place by the Sandman. Through a clever conceit, Disney ends the baby's dream by having the Sandman sing it to sleep (i.e., sleep becomes the cure for a sleep-time adventure in Nowhere Land). So the dream father figure returns Baby to its real-world mother; it curls up in the cradle where its adventures began and falls asleep.

Through it all, Baby is continuously being manipulated, pushed and pulled, lectured and trained, as it



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Three bogey monsters ready to entertain and terrify Baby in *Lullaby Land*

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Signposts to oblivion on a bedspread-meadow in *Lullaby Land*

struggles to exert its natural curiosity. What's curious about the film is how parents introject their world into the content of Baby's dream. Instead of a procession of chocolate cats, calico mares, winking moons, and fly-away horses that Eugene Fields' original poems create, Disney parades child-rearing supplies before the bewildered but intrigued onlooker: a marching potty, high-stepping diapers, leapfrogging Castor Oil bottles, and twanging safety pins. Baby becomes more active as it explores the Forbidden Garden, where a pair of barber shears attacks a Swiss army knife and hot curling irons hiss at a nest of pterodactyl-like sewing scissors. These gremlins, too, emanate from a parental world, products of the modern office, kitchen, and lady's dressing room. What Baby goes after, however, are the watches on a Timepiece Bush. This is Baby's one gesture at liberation: smashing images of time, regulation, and schedule (we are back in the age of the scheduled baby feedings, where one rule fits all). But Baby is expelled from the Forbidden Garden by a guardian cuckoo clock that startles the infant, forcing it back onto an open matchbox. Flaming matches complete the expulsion, driving Baby into a washbasin of sorts, where it sails away on a cake of hand soap. The basin that cleanses Baby in the bubbly water, however, also generates Baby's opposite: three hairy, jiving, and smoky bogey monsters who, with their bouncy song, make sure Baby will stay away: "When we come out into the night/Babies always waken with a fright./Oooooh Wah! Hah! Hah! Hah! Hah! Hah! Hah!"

It's easy to loiter around the Old Testament references mixed in here with the nursery imagery: a forbidden garden filled with taboos; warnings from on high; an innocent who ignores the Word, succumbs to temptation, and is then expelled from the garden in cleansing water. But the eeriness of Baby's journey may derive from even more fundamental tensions that the cartoon continually keeps in play. Behind the sugariness, Disney maintains the contradiction of a lullaby where Baby is told two incompatible things: Mother loves and cares for Baby, but Mother is about to abandon Baby. Baby is being sent to oblivion—a "Lullaby Land of Nowhere"— with "Lullaby Land" signposts pointing in all directions, signs that would be useless even if Baby could read. It is a strange world of quilted meadows and talcum-powder bushes fashioned by all-powerful adults meant to pacify and comfort the infant, but a world which reprimands as soon as Baby tries to engage with it in any way—whether by exploring, trying out a hammer, or playing with matches. It's a world set up for Baby in which it can do nothing right, except to gaze in wonder at grownups who sing and dance for its edification. Baby's protectors and entertainers have any number of lessons to teach it, but the prime object of entering this Land of Nowhere is to escape from it as quickly as possible.

The perfect image is the recurring one of Baby suspended in space, falling but going nowhere. This touches on what Eisenstein found so irresistible in the Symphonies. At their best, Eisenstein claimed, they had the ability to dramatize our primal instinct to return to a Freudian earlier state of things, to womb-like origins, and at the same time find the mysterious bond between that longing and the one for death.[5] Womb imagery is continually getting tangled up with death imagery in *Lullaby Land,* reconciled only when Baby finally goes to sleep, sucking its thumb. Anne Nesbet in *Savage Junctures* analyzes those Freud-based links in wonderful detail in her study of *Snow White* and Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible*; closer to home, Nesbet notes Eisenstein's reading of *Merbabies* as a drive back to origins.[6] Eisenstein would have had a field day with *Lullaby Land* and its preoccupation with repetitions, cycles, doublings, and character splits.

SILLY TODDLERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

One of the best-kept secrets about the Disney Symphonies is the proliferation of nurturing, protective fathers. Mothers tend to work within the confines of conventional stereotypes, but Disney father figures, starting with the Sandman, tend to be cryptic. *Wynken, Blynken & Nod,* made five years after *Lullaby Land,* contains a strange lovely picture of huge, slumbering male clouds staring through the sky at tumbling, lost newborns. The tender, wise look on the clouds as they gently blow the infants across the sky suggests a sense of

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A bemused cloud ready to bedevil three lost babies in *Wynken, Blynken, and Nod*

communion between a benevolent presiding spirit and the white-faced children—something like Santa's affection for children in Disney's Christmas Symphonies. But they are also enigmatic and a little scary, not above having a joke at the child's expense. Those clouds reflect the tone for a range of father figures who look down on their children from a distance—narrating offscreen, or entering last minute as rescuing figures. They never linger. Their acts of benevolence appear like acts of magic (literally so in the case of the Pied Piper of Hamlin), and then the magician disappears.

Parents may or may not be good or caring in other Symphony fairy tales, but what the tales stress, over and again, is that children are lent to parents for a brief time. They are not permanent possessions; instead they are always ready to fly the coop. The spatial structures we have been following are calculated to guarantee safe home bases, but they also keep the child venturing and exploring.

From the start, critics noticed a didactic countermotion in the fairy-tale Symphonies that stressed caution, practicality, and hard work over daydreaming and flights of fancy.[7] The lesson the flying mouse learns from his mentoring fairy is to accept his limitations; the entire point of Baby's dream in *Lullaby Land* is to reinforce Mother's warnings about playing with sharp objects and matches. A grasshopper learns the value of hard work; a tortoise teaches a show-off rabbit that the race belongs to the consistent, not the swift. Charming but moralizing Symphonies like *Elmer Elephant* and *The Wise Little Hen* are primers for teaching manners and good behavior. It is surely significant that the only dream or fantastical sequence in any UA Symphony after *Lullaby Land* is one depicting Ambrose's tall tale in *The Robber Kitten*: fantasy as foolish childish prevarication. In too many films of this period, the argument goes, Disney appears to be wagging his finger at anyone who wants to draw outside the lines.

This argument is not so much wrong as it is incomplete. What it overlooks are the rewards to be found in Disney Symphonies for misadventures and disobedience. Curiosity and daydreaming, it is true, lead to journeys filled with dangerous mishaps and temptations. But the snares and villains the protagonists encounter are invariably the highlights of the film, calculated to delight as well as terrify. What the diamondback rattlesnake, robber bulldog, killer shark, and the she-bear that the truant heroes of *Birds in the Spring, The Robber Kitten, Peculiar Penguins,* and *Little Hiawatha* encounter all share in common is effervescence—a roguish glint in the eye. They frighten but never harm the protagonist. For all his finger-wagging, Disney never underestimates the pleasures and excitements of wandering off. Even the flying mouse, traumatized by the bats who tell him he's a "nuthin'," encounters a beautiful moth princess whom he gets to rescue from a hairy spider. Hiawatha, who encounters a ferocious bear on his foolish foray into the woods, also finds an array of small animals who befriend and eventually rescue him. To see where this is going, we need only look at *Pinocchio*, where the little marionette, after routinely ignoring Jiminy Cricket's good advice and plunging into increasingly terrifying misadventures, rescues his father with all the lessons he has learned from misbehaving.

CASTE AND CLASS IN THE SYMPHONIES

From the start, Disney cast outsiders as his Symphony heroes, and this tendency only grew as the series developed. The most popular protagonist in the earliest Sillies was a spider, an inquisitive toddler who breaks into taboo places like Egyptian tombs and locked-up toy stores simply to look around, and who then accidentally causes a rumpus. He is a hairy, agile baby, fascinated and bewildered by what he sees, then finally scared back into solitude (Disney spiders, even babies, don't have moms or dads). When narrative takes over in the fairy-tale Symphonies, the roles of the outsider only multiply. The protagonist remains the principal loner, either an odd or ugly or lost kind of adolescent who has wandered or run away from his family. But in a large number of Sillies, the creatures who teach, terrify, inspire, or force the wanderer to return home are themselves outcasts. The bogeymen in *Lullaby Land* and the singing bats in *The Flying Mouse* are only the most famous examples. They illustrate the difficulty of

analyzing these films in terms of class or ethnicity, as Disney commentators since the 1960s have tended to do. These teachers, though unwashed, scary, and alien (they speak in hoarse whispers or in corrosive Brooklyn accents), are the hippest characters in the film. And, as Edward Rothstein noticed, they get the best songs.[8] Like the crows in *Dumbo* and the alley cats in *The Aristocats,* they are more knowledgeable and wittier than any of the insiders, and infinitely cooler than their insider lily-white counterparts, sprites and fairies with wands.

As in the 30s Mickey Mouse, fairy-tale Symphony heroes are usually marked as the deserving, hardworking poor. They have patches on their clothes, modest homes, and travel on foot. In the case of *The Pied Piper, The Grasshopper and the Ants, The Cookie Carnival, Three Orphan Kittens,* and *Broken Toys,* the heroes are overtly homeless vagabonds. But more generally, family circumstance is ignored. Wealth and estates belong exclusively to royalty, like the feuding royals in *Music Land* or the kings in *Old King Cole* and *The Golden Touch,* or the queen ant in *The Grasshopper and the Ants.* When the hobo wins the beauty queen in *The Cookie Carnival,* he hopscotches over the bourgeoisie to the world of mock aristocracy. Otherwise, there are no happy endings in Silly Symphonies marked by acquisition of wealth or social status. It is enough that the protagonist makes it safely back home, or in the case of *The Grasshopper and the Ants,* is given shelter and food.

Further, no ethnic characters function as villains in the Sillies. The closest we ever get is the wolf posing as a Jewish peddler in an effort to break into Practical Pig's brick house. Otherwise, ethnic and racial characters like Hiawatha, the singing black maid in *Three Orphan Kittens,* the Irish cops in *Who Killed Cock Robin?* and the Stepin Fetchit lazybones in *Broken Toys*, though patronized and badly clichéd, are sympathetic. This is no accident. Ethnicity, particularly in the 1930s, involved complicated relations between the outsider and the center, the immigrant and the mainstream, an aspiring lower class and a complacent middle. And this is precisely the theme of most Silly Symphonies. Dyed-in-the-wool Disney villains are predators (cats, wolves, lions, hawks, alligators, anthropomorphic flames, and swarms of bees) that want to consume the protagonist. The female hero is often—with surprising frequency, in fact—threatened with sexual consumption, as in *Flowers and Trees*, where a decrepit, ugly tree stump pursues a female sapling and literally burns up with self-destructive passion; or in *The Moth and the Flame*, where a satyr-like flame drawn to resemble Clark Gable pursues a silly female moth. The oddest variation is the frustrated god of the underworld in the operatic *The Goddess of Spring*, where a Mephistophelean demon reaches a compromise with Persephone after having failed to woo her for his permanent bride. This was the Symphony tyrant in melodramatic form: physically imposing, charismatic, and satanic.

But when evil turns familial it is associated with pretense, bullying, and snobbery that work to make the protagonist feel excluded and unwanted. The Symphony world is a melting pot that treats pride or self-righteousness as original sin. By the mid-30s, this code took Disney in rather startling directions. *Mother Pluto* (1936) is a case in point, an intriguing Symphony in this regard, quietly defying gender stereotypes. A silly, irresponsible mother hen has laid her eggs in Pluto's doghouse and then, distracted, runs off to pursue a butterfly. Reversing the stereotype of the all-giving, self-sacrificing mother, she lets Pluto hatch her eggs and deal with a swarm of newborns. The bulk of the cartoon shows Pluto coping with the chicks. From a brood of unwanted pests, they become his adopted children whom he cuddles, plays with, mentors, and protects. Frantic mother returns, frightening the chicks into Pluto's protective paws. But she retrieves them through the simple expedient of setting the cockerel-father against the canine usurper. The comic battle ends when Pluto is driven back to his doghouse. But the happy ending, which, as we might expect in an eight-minute cartoon, sidesteps all the thorny issues of parental rights, has the chicks reunited with their "real" mother, Pluto, who collects them between his paws and, like Ferdinand the Bull, smiles a sleepy, contented smile.

Four years later, Dr. Seuss would bring out the radical implications of gender reversal and parental guardianship in one of his early masterpieces, *Horton Hatches the Egg.* But Disney anticipates him in these last Sillies, where bad motherhood is linked to smug assumptions of entitlement.

The studio's 1938 remake of *The Ugly Duckling* (released in 1939) mines the same territory, explicitly casting the mother as a hurtful snob and her baby as the unwelcome outsider. Disney digs deeper this time, starting with a comic mini-drama to motivate Mother's rejection of Baby. She herself has been dumped. Father duck, noticing that the baby duckling neither looks nor sounds like him, assumes the worst and storms out, leaving Mother to tend the duckling's brothers and sisters by herself. Resentful of an infant whose honking and oversized body have cost her her drake, Mother chucks him into the water, squawks at him, and hurries away with her other children. What follows are the adventures of a traumatized orphan. Strikingly, what first overwhelms the duckling is neither the fear of hunger,

exposure, nor even of being lost. Rather, the rejected duckling is paralyzed by his sense of inadequacy, even self-disgust. The primal scene, the scene that triggers all that follows, is that of the duckling looking at his reflection in a pond, pausing, and then bursting into tears. The duckling sees himself and is appalled by what he sees, perceiving that his face, voice, and body mark him as a freakish, unlovable alien.

He rushes to a bird's nest where he cuddles with innocent birdlings, but is chased away again by another mother who is unwilling to share food meant for her own babies. The duckling then runs into a brightly colored, smiling decoy duck, the epitome of the aloof, indifferent guardian. In a brilliant tour-de-force, Disney has the duckling nestle on the back of the decoy, soothed by the gentle rocking motion of the pseudo-parent, ready to play as it skis off the decoy's bill, and then cruelly disillusioned as the remorseless wooden duck beak tips forward and smashes him in the face. He breaks into tears for the second time, once again reacting to his grotesque, distorted face reflected in the water.

Disney retains the classic Andersen ending, but what is Disneyesque is that the swan who adopts him is never established as the duckling's natural mother. Her entitlement to the duckling is based entirely on her affection for him and the playful, welcoming sounds her children make toward the stranger. The point is underscored by a final jab at the "real" mother, when the fortified duckling now honks back at her and paddles off, abandoning her as she had abandoned him.

Disney would pursue this formula of the abandonment and rescue of orphans and semi-orphans in his classic feature films, but what remains distinctive about this theme as it gets worked out in the Silly Symphonies is how often the coldhearted guardian who abandons the child is the actual parent rather than a stepparent or foster parent. Even more significant is how the abandoned child finally finds acceptance. In the earliest Symphonies, the child must perform some heroic act to redeem himself. In the first version of *The Ugly Duckling,* for instance, the duckling rescues his mother and siblings as they are about to fall over a waterfall. Because the duckling is now a hero, he can at last be loved. But the great insight comes in the last Symphonies, particularly in *The Ugly Duckling* remake and in *Ferdinand the Bull*, where the young calf survives ridicule and continuous pressures to conform by maintaining his gentle, eccentric temperament. Like the new ugly duckling, Ferdinand no longer has to perform heroic deeds. As Ellen Handler Spitz phrases it, he likes himself just the way he is.[9]

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A decoy duck as the indifferent parent in *The Ugly Duckling*

AN EXCEPTION TO THE SILLY RULES: *THREE LITTLE PIGS*

The patterns we have been studying become all the more vivid when juxtaposed with two Sillies that don't seem to fit. *Three Little Pigs,* the most famous and arguably the most durable of the Symphonies, breaks almost all the Symphony rules we have been charting. This is the one Silly that works with youngsters off on their own, too young for sweethearts but living without any parental figure.

The story is constructed as theme and variation: a pig is interrupted from building his home by a wolf trying to invade it; the wolf destroys the house; the wolf pursues the pig to a sturdier house. This, too, is unlike the other Disney child-centered narratives, built around protagonists who venture out into the world, explore, and then return home. *Three Little Pigs* is closer to the repeat pattern of a nursery rhyme or toddler culture in general, a pattern that extends to the heroes themselves—brothers who, like the later Disney toddlers Wynken, Blynken, and Nod, are virtual clones of each other. Homes are destroyed, one after another, but the pigs simply start over again, back in another home.

Which brings us to yet another curious aspect of the film: the developmental stage of the pigs. Like Pinocchio, these pigs are part-toddler, part-adolescent —old enough to build their own houses, decorate them with girlie pictures and prize-fighter portraits, yet young enough to have high voices and be dressed in pre-schooler sailor jackets and oversize bow ties. Except for Practical Pig, they are not old enough to wear trousers.

This, in fact, is a pre-sexual, self-contained infant world of play where adults are represented as dead meat

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Old enough for girlie pictures, too young for pants in *Three Little Pigs*

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Practical Pig gives the wolf the hot seat in *Three Little Pigs*.

or hairy outsiders. Family pictures indicate the whereabouts of the parents: father was last seen as a joint of pork and a line of link sausage. Mother, though represented nursing a half-dozen piglets, is suspiciously gone too. These boys are on their own.

Visually, they are the quintessential Disney infants, graphically little more than smooth, rounded cheeks and buttocks: edible babies. Pigs distinguish themselves from other barnyard animals in that they have been brought to the farm for only one reason: to be slaughtered and then consumed. Children's writers can't deflect this, as they can with other farm animals, by stressing porcine services unrelated to the butcher. Pigs don't lay eggs, give wool, pull plows, herd sheep, provide milk, or afford transportation. They provide pork. To turn pigs into surrogate babies or make them part of the baby world, as Lewis Carroll does when he gives the screaming duchess a piglet to nurse, is to make particularly dark and deadly, not to mention cannibalistic, connections.

And who, in *Three Little Pigs,* wants to eat the young? A figure represented as the pigs' absolute opposite: adult, lean, dark and, above all, hairy, with sharp, pointed teeth. If the pigs are the innocents, safe only at home, the wolf is the outsider, a wandering trickster with a vivacious enthusiasm for disguise, chases, and inept ruses. His stovepipe hat and carpetbag indicate a passerby; when he disguises himself, he impersonates other kinds of wanderers: a Jewish peddler, a lost sheep. But for all the primal contrasts with the pigs, by the end contrasts give way to equally primal likenesses. Chase and pursuit are traded for invasion and resistance as the wolf reveals a single-mindedness equal to that of his nemesis, Practical Pig. If the wolf exists only to consume pigs, Practical Pig lives only to devise defenses. The effervescence with which pig and wolf each pursues his goal is a central part of the film's extraordinary appeal. The wolf's resourcefulness with preposterous disguises is matched with the pig's comic ingenuity in devising ersatz wolf repellants. And just as Disney bowdlerizes the wolf's pursuit of the first two pigs (in the early British version of the tale collected in Halliwell, the wolf eats them), so he also bowdlerizes the ending (where the original predator, a fox, is boiled to death and eaten too).[10] In sparing lives, Disney not only makes the movie less frightful (avoiding the prospect of watching a pig eat the creature that ate his brothers and thereby finessing the thorny issue of whether Practical Pig is a cannibal once removed). He has also made it possible for the cycle to continue in sequels.[11]

ANOTHER EXCEPTION: *WHO KILLED COCK ROBIN?*

Who Killed Cock Robin?, made two years after *Three Little Pigs,* is, if anything, even more transgressive. Until its belated appearance on the 2001 Silly Symphony DVD,[12] the film went virtually unseen for almost 70 years: never reissued, shown on television only once and in truncated form, and never released on video because of offensive stereotypes—first a Stepin Fetchit crow, then a mincing homosexual Cupid. Yet it is an altogether remarkable film, arguably, along with *The Band Concert,* the most intricately designed short film Disney ever made. The satire is dark and brutal, but also mercurial and unpredictable. The classic Symphony woodland has been turned into a tough little bird town with a honky-tonk bar built into the base of a tenement tree, while a flying paddy wagon made from a bird cage propelled by jaybirds takes suspects to a

shaded clearing tricked up to look like an open air criminal court. Keystone Kops bash any head that's handy; a hanging judge merrily condemns defendants to satisfy the whim of a bosomy wren; and a jury, thrilled at the prospect of multiple hangings, dances and plays patty-cake. Joe Grant, who co-wrote the film with Bill Cottrell, claimed Cottrell used Gilbert and Sullivan as his inspiration.[13] But the court scene is closer to the rough and tumble world of minstrelsy, slapstick burlesque, and the Marx Brothers—particularly *Duck Soup*—than to the refined topsy-turvey of nineteenth-century operetta. The lightning-fast comic patter on the witness stand (all dialogue is either sung or spoken in rhyming couplets) has the feel of a gaudy burlesque routine punctuated by rapid-fire whacks on the head and the obligatory appearance of a head-turning, chesty woman. The spectators in the courtroom resemble an all-male audience in a theater revue, a collection of stage-door Johnnies and sugar daddies who break out into a collective cold sweat when the bombshell shows up.

In this seven-minute cartoon about murder, sex, and Jim Crow justice, several generic formulas are seamlessly braided together. The famous nursery rhyme has been turned into a pre-noir crime story, the rhyme's classic question turned into the start of an all-bird, woodland murder mystery complete with the round-up of suspects, a trial, a surprise culprit, and then a twist ending that turns the mystery formula on its head. But the film is also constructed like a miniature musical comedy in which everyone performs, acting out roles within roles. We start with a performance—a crooning robin serenades Jenny Wren in the Bing Crosby style; Jenny responds by primping and playing directly to the audience à la Mae West. A bird seen only in shadow fires an arrow at Robin, appearing to kill him. This, we later learn, is only a make-believe killing or, better, a metaphorical killing made misleadingly concrete. Meanwhile, everything about the Robin's death is made hypertheatrical. Robin doesn't simply fall down and die. He sails down the full length of a tall tree past a half-dozen shocked tree dwellers, each of whom pokes a head out of a window, tracking the falling bird with pop-out eyes as Robin plops to the ground. From there the film is played as dramatic spectacle, from the round-up of three suspects and the mock jury trial to the final appearance of the bird with the bow and arrow—a sissy Dan Cupid who reveals that Cock Robin is only play-acting death: he has actually fallen into a love-struck swoon.

Flamboyant theatrical display is constantly intertwined with sex and crime. At the center of the film is

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Judge encounters Jenny Wren, star witness in *Who Killed Cock Robin?*

the amazing Jenny Wren, the song-chirping sexual provocatrice revealed as the innocent and not-so-innocent man killer. The delicious irony is that, believing someone else killed her Robin, she becomes the voice—the singing, torchy voice—who through song and sexual wile whips up judge and jury to attempt more murder and mayhem. Finally, we learn, the arrow that felled Cock Robin is a love arrow, shot by Jenny's partner in crime, the god of love, who is played as a giggling sexual deviant: another child-like innocent who, like Jenny, is a not-so-innocent tease. Appropriately, the film ends with the most explicitly erotic image Disney ever created—love-sick Robin falling to his knees giving pleasure to a groaning Jenny Wren while, keeping Robin's head hidden from us, Jenny's parasol spins like mad.

And then, layered on top of the nursery rhyme, crime, and musical formulas are the celebrity caricatures. *Cock Robin* was the first of only three Symphonies built around caricature (the other two: *Broken Toys* and *Mother Goose Goes Hollywood*). Otherwise, when Disney caricatured celebrities at all in the Symphonies, he worked with cameo inserts—the Jimmy Durante-like pelicans in *Elmer Elephant,* for instance. But turning the main characters in *Cock Robin* into caricatures was an inspired decision, resulting not only in a brilliant rendering of Mae West as a strutting red bird, but also creating an interesting new tension in the multilayered satire.

What is striking about the caricature is the affection with which the celebrities are rendered. Don Crafton in his analysis of the Warner Brothers caricature effectively applies Ernst Kris's argument that all caricature is inherently aggressive, a form of symbolic resistance that assaults subject and audience alike.[14]

Crafton draws a line (both nuanced and elegant) from Daumier to Clampett, arguing that in the hands of satirists like these, the parody is double-edged, confirming the subject's celebrity status but also making personal and ideological assaults on the cult of idiosyncratic excess.

Such expectations are what make the *Cock Robin* caricatures appropriate for the multilayered satire. But strikingly, the caricature in this film is the one element that lacks satiric bite. The celebrities are cast only in the most sympathetic roles: they are either the victims —Edward G. Robinson, Harpo Marx, and Stepin Fetchit—or, in the case of Mae West, the aggrieved. Their assailants—the farcically corrupt judge, the brutal cops, and the snide, mocking jury—are all drawn as generic Cady-like birds. But, more subtly, what softens the parody is that the celebrities are all cast in dramatic roles that go beyond the iconic essences of their public personalities. That is, we in the audience delight in recognizing topical references to famous personalities, but that recognition is not necessary to comprehend the character or the narrative, nor does the satire involve celebrity status (as it almost invariably does in the Warners caricature cartoons). None of the characters within the story recognize any other character as a movie star. Jenny Wren fascinates the judge because she is sexy, not because she is Mae West. Robin is not shot because he croons like Bing Crosby or wears Crosby's trademark straw skimmer, but because he is a softhearted victim of Cupid's arrow. The gentle humor that derives from the caricature, in short, has been separated out from the dark wit that derives from the assorted roles these celebrities are made to perform.

The result is an extraordinary one-of-a-kind that neither Disney nor anyone else ever repeated. 1935 was the peak year for Silly Symphonies. And in a year of extraordinary Disney one-reelers—*The Band Concert, Music Land, The Tortoise and the Hare, Mickey's Garden, Pluto's Judgement Day,* and *On Ice—Who Killed Cock Robin?* stands out as his classic American death-trap satire.

In subjecting a selection of Silly Symphonies to close critical analysis, my aim hasn't been to provide a definitive interpretation of any particular work. But I have tried to suggest why so many of them have proven so resilient and how, when read against the grain, so many not-obvious meanings can be attached to them. As cartoons that were famously calculated for audiences made up of children, adolescents, and adults, they worked from the outset across a range of meanings; and those levels have only multiplied as the films have now circulated across 70 years and two generations. As such, they lend themselves to a certain interpretive elasticity, subject to a rich variety of interpretation. I have tried to make the case that the Symphonies illustrate a sensitivity toward psychological themes particularly important to children. But I have written this from the perspective of someone far removed from childhood, who treasures complexity and nuance in works that I would likely have enjoyed for their simplicity and directness as a child. In a somewhat similar way, Symphony themes that seem most directly linked to 30s America—populist folk armies conquering tyrannical predators, immigrant outsiders and vagabonds teaching inexperienced children—are intertwined with themes that have particular force for us in a new century: the fragility of family ties, the closed-mindedness of rural provincialism and the loss of social cohesion.

What impresses me most is how interconnected our adult responses are to our responses as children. We are accustomed to assume that our childhood responses are incomplete because children cannot comprehend the assorted levels of meaning that the works contain. But the mysterious power that these films hold over our childhood is only partially explained by our later perception of underlying complexity. What I think drives our critical inquiry is an effort, once we have become disenthralled from our initial response, to make sense of that early sense of wonder, confusion, pleasure, or frightfulness that we have lost.

NOTES

This is for Karen Merritt and Anne Nesbet, my two best critics.

1. Ellen Handler Spitz, *Inside Picture Books* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 8.
2. All the Silly Symphonies discussed in this article can most readily be found on the two discs of *Walt Disney Treasures: Silly Symphonies.* Disney Enterprises, Inc., 2001.
3. William Paul, "Art, Music, Nature, and Walt Disney," *Movie* 24 (Summer 1977): 44-52.
4. Space considerations prevent an analysis of the most impressive example of a single site subsuming contradictory values: *The Old Mill.* This is studied in detail in Russell Merritt and J.B. Kaufman, *Walt Disney's Silly Symphonies* (Friuli, Italy: Cineteca del Friuli, 2005).
5. Sergei Eisenstein, *Eisenstein on Disney,* ed. Jay Leyda, trans. Alan Upchurch (London: Methuen, 1988), 2.
6. Anne Nesbet, *Savage Junctures: Sergei Eisenstein and the Shape of Thinking* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 198-99; and in conversation with author.
7. See, for instance, Robert Sklar, "The Making of Cultural Myths: Walt Disney," *Movie-Made America* (New York: Random House, 1975), 63-64; and Ross Care, "Cinesymphony," *Sight and Sound* (Winter 1976-77): 40-44.
8. Edward Rothstein, "Ethnicity and Disney: It's a Whole New Myth," *New York Times* (14 December 1997), Arts & Leisure: 37.

9. Spitz, 176-77.
10. James Halliwell originally published the folk tale in 1853. The Disney version adapts Andrew Lang's treatment in *The Green Fairy Book* (London: Longman, 1892), 100-5.
11. And he made three of them (*The Big Bad Wolf*; *Three Little Wolves*; and *The Practical Pig*), plus a 1941 wartime version as a savings bond trailer for the National Film Board of Canada.
12. To access *Who Killed Cock Robin?* (it is not listed on the *Silly Symphony* DVD menu), go to the "Character" menu on Disc 1, then click on the baby chick icon.
13. Quoted in John Canemaker, *Before the Animation Begins* (New York: Hyperion, 1996), 56-57.
14. Donald Crafton, "The View from Termite Terrace: Caricature and Parody in Warner Bros. Animation," in *Reading the Rabbit,* ed. Kevin S. Sandler (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 101-20.

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ABSTRACT Disney broke away from gag-centered cartoons in favor of fantasy narrative in his Silly Symphony cartoon series, produced in the 1930s. In landmark Symphonies such as *The Ugly Duckling, Babes in the Woods, Lullaby Land, Who Killed Cock Robin?,* and *Three Little Pigs* he explores with remarkable potency the inner life of the child—dramatizing the child's issues of separation, sense of shame, struggle to control impulses, fear of annihilation, and love of adventure.

■ **Kriss Ravetto-Biagioli**

FLOATING ON THE BORDERS OF EUROPE SOKUROV'S *RUSSIAN ARK*

On the table, in the glow of the wax candle, stood the tiny bronze Europa riding a galloping bull. Balocanksi took the tiny figurine in his hand and began to examine it under the light holding it close to his eyes, so that he seemed to be sniffing at the little Europa like a dog.

—*Miroslav Krleza,* The Return of Philip Latinowicz

THIS VIGNETTE FROM KRLEZA'S 1932 novel with its image of sniffing might encapsulate the complex relationship of Europe to what Etienne Balibar has called its double borders—those lands that are both within and outside of European borders.[1] Like many films from Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean (such as the work of Theodoros Angelopoulos, Youssef Chahine, and Gianni Amelio), Aleksandr Sokurov's *Russkij kovcheg*/*Russian Ark* (2003) examines the identity and national politics that emerge from such desirous orientations toward Europe. Yet rather than represent this (unfortunately unrequited) sniffing as a form of pure adulation of the figure of Europe on the part of the liminal or non-European, these films reveal the instability of geographical, historical, and cultural points of reference. This does not mean that they place the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe in the proverbial backwaters, at the crossroads between Europe and Asia (or the Orient). But by looking toward Europe, they examine the placement (or self-placement) of the "East" in Europe's master narratives (of progress, civilization, development), wherein "Easterners" must struggle for national and ethnic identities that conform to notions of European statehood and culture. A central issue in *Russian Ark* is the spread of enlightenment thought and the rise of the nation-state, and with it various forms of nationalism. Accompanying the age of the nation-state—first its emergence from under the tutelage of Empire, and second its ferocious return after the fall of Soviet-styled socialism—there has been an explosion of discourses about nationalism and nostalgia. Many critics have pointed out that nostalgia signifies a longing (*algia*) to "return" home (*nostos*). The construction of a homeland, driven by longing, can in turn conveniently be used as a means of legitimizing the "emerging" nation-state after the age of Empire (Ottoman, Russian, Austro-Hungarian) and the Cold World order. This "return" to the nation-state, however, as Benedict Anderson and Stathis Gourgouris argue,[2] is more a product of imagination and dreams than an historical fact, since it involves rather forgetting the recent past (and even present) than recollecting a distant history. *Russian Ark* demonstrates how nostalgia for an imaginary past often produces various forms of erasure and national myths of origin. It treats history not as fact but as a poetic construction that has drifted in and out of Europe via metaphor, allusion, and myth.

Russian Ark begins with the anxiety produced by a sense of disorientation. The establishing shot is one of complete darkness accompanied by a cacophony of sounds—the wind, a ship's foghorn, the tuning of instruments, the sound of moving water, muffled laughter, and distorted musical accents that merge into one another to become indistinguishable. This haunting background sound reappears throughout the remaining 90 minutes of film. A voice (Sokurov's own)

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Francesco Albani's *The Rape of Europa* (circa 1640-45), now housed in the Hermitage

emerges out of the darkness and, almost as if in an internal monologue, seeks to orient itself: "I open my eyes and I see nothing, I remember only that there was some calamity . . . but I just can't remember what happened to me." Alluding to the opening lines of Dante's *Inferno* (and Pushkin's allegorical images of the flood of St. Petersburg in 1824), this lost soul seems to have strayed from the course of time.[3] There is no beginning or ending to this film; no foreboding entrance (as in the case of Dante's *Inferno*), only an unexpected immersion in what appears to be the simultaneous presence of various layers of the past. The images that suddenly appear out of nowhere before this off-screen persona are fleeting and sporadic recollections of historical scenes, interactions, and performances anachronistically joined into one spectacular, continuous, unedited shot. Though time is certainly out of joint, this persona will remain estranged from the "action" of the film. As the voice (and the camera) follows a group of eighteenth-century officers and ladies through the back entrance of the Hermitage—presumably the one designated for people of lesser rank and court performers—he remarks, "Can it be that I am invisible, or simply gone unnoticed?" The fact that there is no identifying shot leaves the identity behind the persona of the voice ambiguous; it could be the voice of the museum itself that witnesses history and the various Russian figures that float through its halls, the gaze of the camera that records and frames its own image of history, architecture, and artifacts, or the specter of an uncertain and indeterminate Russian present that haunts the halls of its monumental past. Yet this monumental past is quite exclusive, limited not only to the space of the Hermitage museum and the Winter Palace (the main residence of the Czars), but also to the epoch of Petrine reforms—from the time of Peter the Great to Czar Nicholas II.

Later in the film, the "calamity" from which this solitary voice claims to awaken is clearly identified with the almost 80 years of Soviet rule. The entire Soviet period is presented as an ellipsis in Russian history that is left unnamed and unrepresented in the film. Yet the presence of an half-forgotten memory, neither truly there nor absent, haunts this Russian Ark, especially since the Hermitage and the Winter Palace played such a significant iconographic role in the Bolshevik Revolution and its commemoration in Sergei Eisenstein's *October* (*Oktyabr* [1927]) and Vsevolod Pudovkin's *The End of St. Petersburg* (*Konets Sankt-Peterburga* [1927]). As Dragan Kujundzić argues, *Russian Ark*'s composition as a single long take "enacts the erasure of the dominant cinematic tradition . . . of Sergei Eisenstein's intellectual montage."[4] In fact, the film reverses the frenzied finale of *October* that depicts the Bolsheviks storming the Winter Palace, climbing the famous Jordan staircase and unseating Kerenski and the provisional government,

Czar Nicholas with his family

which historically took place in the very same room we see in *Russian Ark*. This time, however, the room is the stage for an intimate domestic scene of Czar Nicholas II having a meal with his family. These images of Nicholas II and his family are over-exposed (with a slightly reddish hue), giving the figures a ghostly, if not saintly, quality, while also suggesting that they have been worn out by various competing histories and fantasies (such as Disney's *Anastasia*). Yet the reddish cast also reminds us that they have been bathed in blood. As opposed to the triumphal ending of *October, Russian Ark* concludes with the languid flow of Russian nobles (from various periods) down the same Jordan staircase and out of the palace toward both a certain (Soviet) and uncertain (post-Soviet) future.

The deliberate omission of references to the Bolshevik Revolution replicates not only the long history of forced forgetting conducted by the Soviet state, but also draws attention to the current erasure of names—the Soviet Union has disintegrated into various nation-states, and in 1991 Leningrad once again became St. Petersburg. The replacement of names with exclusively nationalist ones turns the memory of lived experience into the politics of memory. Svetlana Boym points out that "The relationship between 'Russian and Soviet' is highly contested in the post-Soviet period. Extreme views of this relationship range from viewing the Soviet Union as 'Russophobic'… to viewing the Soviet period as a brief episode in the history of the Russian empire."[5]

While there are references to listening devices placed in the museum by the KGB and to the "worms" that have eaten (destroyed or sold off) the throne in the memorial hall of Peter the Great, there is only one fleeting glimpse of the Soviets. Red Army soldiers march across a darkened room for only a few seconds, but they are framed inbetween two static and respectively more permanent images: *The Sacrifice of Isaac* and *The Return of the Prodigal Son,* both by Rembrandt. But there is no commemoration of the sacrifices endured and produced by the Soviets: the image of the soldiers is immediately followed by the sound of Nazi aircraft which foreshadows the following scene, where we see a man making his own coffin in a bombed-out room of the Hermitage during the Germans' 900-day siege of Leningrad. The siege is symbolized by coffins and empty picture frames, and it is referred to by the invisible persona as "a great sacrifice on the part of the people and the museum."

The fact that this image of the Red Army travels between these two religious images—one of sacrifice and the other of the belated return (spiritual awakening) of the prodigal son—makes it seem more allegorical than historical. This shift between the allegorical (Old Testament) father(land) that is willing to sacrifice its son(s) and the wayward son who returns to the forgiving benevolent (New Testament) father(land) suggests both the end of an era of sacrifice and the return to a spiritualized fatherland (home or national identity). However, the placing of the image (of the Red Army) that seems to have no spiritual future next to religious images that have been interpreted as prophetic (prefiguration of Christ's atonement and second coming) is enigmatic: it questions the boundaries between anonymous (visionless) secular sacrifice (to the state or to the people) and (priceless) iconic spiritual prophecy. Although fleeting, this sudden appearance of Red Army soldiers recalls not only the sacrifice of one million inhabitants of Leningrad during World War II, but also the sacrifice of the hundreds of thousands of nameless men and women it took to build and rebuild this monumental city. What is at stake here is not the political future of the nation-state—the invisible persona does not know what kind of state has preceded the disastrous Soviet one—but the Russian soul, as indicated in the very title of the film.[6]

Although construed as a "national liberation," as Anatoly Khazanov argues, the break with the Soviet past has produced not one debate but many different ideologized interpretations of history, many of which have been accompanied by the desire to associate with the Russian imperial past.[7] The obsession in the 90s with finding the remains of Czar Nicholas II and his family, their interment in a proper site of resting, and the possible canonization of the murdered Romanovs by the Russian Orthodox Church—with the exception of the left-leaning Grand Duke Nicholas Mikhailovich—represents the impossible dream of returning Russia to its past greatness under the czars. But this discourse also establishes the Romanovs as the martyred victims of the Red Terror, cleansing them of their own terrible

acts.[8] As Gourgouris argues, nostalgia for the patria, or lost nation, is always utopian and always impossible: "The Nation is both museum site and ground of oblivion . . . where repression and the return of the repressed take place simultaneously."[9]

Russian Ark honors, if not privileges, this nostalgic image of the czar cut adrift from any historical reality outside of the walls of the Winter Palace. The choice of Mikhail Glinka's mazurka "Life for the Czar"—composed in the late nineteenth century to praise the czar and the Orthodox Russian people and played live by the Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra during the spectacular finale of *Russian Ark*—not only reconstructs the last ball of Czar Nicholas II in 1913, but also connects the czar to the Russian soul, and to Russia's current national identity (especially since Glinka's "Patriotic Song" has become the new Russian national anthem). Upon entering the Memorial Hall of Peter the Great, the disembodied voice reflects on the ambiguity of such nostalgia: "Monarchies are not eternal, but we are free to dream away."

Despite this awareness, the film recycles these self-constructed (and recollected) dream images of the czars who fancied themselves reformers, modernizers, westernizers who transformed Russia into one of the Great European Powers. While *Russian Ark* treats the past (the costumes, gestures, music, historical reenactments, etc.) with meticulous detail, it mimics the historically revised image of Imperial Russia, never once following those serfs (or servants) who paid the high price of the czars' "enlightened" lifestyle. As Stanley Kauffman writes: "Except for the few modern visitors everyone in the film is in the social range from gentry up to royalty." If this is really a "Russian" ark, he asks, "Where is there even a hint of Russia's entirety?"[10] Maybe this is why the owner of the off-screen voice—which represents and defends Russia—is invisible.

As *Russian Ark* participates in mass amnesia—treating the Bolshevik Revolution as both a rupture with and an interruption of Russian history—it draws attention to the problems caused by such erasures and desperate attempts to scour the national archives (or treasures) in order to salvage or reinvent some form of legitimacy. But just what type of continuity does this single uninterrupted gaze establish? If this continuity is just a dream, to whom does this dream belong? Although the ark is called "Russkij" (of the people), Sokurov's film demonstrates how the contents of the ark (both the priceless objects and the live pageantry) belong to another ark: that of the "Rossiikij" (the name of the great empire), which orients itself toward Europe. Kujundzić points out "that the dramatic tension of the

Eighteenth-century ladies

film pertains to the question of identification (and the Russian national identity) that lies in the fact that the space of commemoration relies also on artifacts that have nothing to do with Russia, but are entirely imported from the West, and thus, structurally from outside of this site of memory."[11]

Even the art work featured in the film is selective, favoring enduring European representations of religious figures (Sts. Peter and Paul, St. John the Baptist, the Madonna, and a variety of angels), and mythological ones (Danaë, the Three Graces). The only depiction of a "lesser," more "dated" figure is Frans Jansz van Mieris I's *Lady in her Boudoir*. But this painting of a bourgeois lady, her handmaid, and her dog is accompanied by the disdainful comment (on the part of the European stranger who guides the camera to the painting): ". . . rags, a dog, eternal people. Live and go on living, you'll outlive them all." Yet the stranger seems to extend his scorn to the disembodied speaker, whom he growls at, giving him a contemptuous glance just prior to approaching the painting. This disembodied persona seems to belong not only to the Third Estate, but also to these eternal people whose presence can be seen in the modern (contemporary) scenes. Although not complete strangers, they are clearly visitors to, rather than inhabitants of, the ark.

In fact, the film reminds us that St. Petersburg itself was built as a Russian dream of Europe. Peter the Great moved the capital of Russia from Moscow to St. Petersburg, built a European-style city on a swamp, and collected artifacts, ideas, institutions, intellectuals, and artisans from Europe so as to westernize Russia. Even if the artisans and architects of the city were either foreigners imported from Europe (e.g., Bartolomeo Rastrelli, Carlo Rossi) or Russians influenced by the culture of the Renaissance, Baroque, and Enlightenment (all featured in the film), and the implementation of such reforms were, as the companion of the invisible persona

declares, "of the most primitive kind," the voice tells us that "Petersburg is still a European city." But as Michael Gordin argues, the Petrine reforms were designed less to enlighten the Russians than to establish political absolutism by enforcing Western court etiquette and a new social (aristocratic) class at the expense of the boyars, the Orthodox church, and ultimately, the lower classes.[12] What is copied from Europe is primarily the gesture of consolidating political power as exemplified by Louis XIV,[13] and secondarily, the international and domestic image of Russia—the appearance of Russia as European. While St. Petersburg (particularly the Hermitage) in its naissance was already a museum of the "old European masters," it was on the other hand (as Sokurov suggests) an imagined city, the czars' untimely dream of Italy or Europe that was designed not so much to copy Europe as to extend the borders of the map of Europe from the Elbe and the Julian Alps to the Ural mountains. As the Russian speaker tells us, "The czars were mostly Russophiles, but sometimes they dreamed of Italy."

Although fascinated by the spectacle of power, the invisible speaker seems incapable not only of anchoring himself in this particular past, but also of understanding it. It is not until he encounters a kindred spirit, who appears to be just as lost and disoriented, that he seems to establish a point of reference. But this anchoring comes in the form of a tenuous, if not antagonistic, dialogue between the invisible persona and the onscreen stranger, whom this persona calls "Europe." He is later identified by the persona's (contemporary) friends as the "Marquis," and in the last sequence of the film by the nineteenth-century spy (who shadows these visitors throughout the film) as the Marquis Astolphe de Custine—a French diplomat to Russia who wrote a critical travelogue (*La Russie en 1839*). Although this figure bears certain resemblances to the historical Custine—he is both awe-struck at the opulence and beauty of the czars' possessions and also acerbically critical of their rule—he is more a composite (Russian) figure of Europe than an accurate depiction of Custine. William Johnson comments:

> The most egregious difference is that [the *Russian Ark*'s Custine] accepts the imperial political system without question at the end, after taking part in the grand ball, and decides to stay in Russia, while the actual Marquis, who expected to admire a system without a representative government (his father and grandfather were guillotined in the Reign of Terror), was appalled by it, noting the fear even among the nobility of expressing any kind of political or social criticism.[14]

Russian Ark, then, seems to reverse the Marquis' attitude toward Russia.

It is in contrast to Europe (i.e., Custine) that the unseen persona becomes identified as Russian. Rather than delineating any essential differences between Europe and Russia, this dialogue enacts the process of othering. While "Europe" calls the invisible speaker his "Russian cicerone," it is "Europe" who will guide Russia through the theater or dream of the imperial past, constructing his own version of history. Larry Wolff demonstrates how the construction of "Eastern Europe" as a category by representatives of the "Western Enlightenment" (in this case a French monarchist) secured both Europe's own myth of Europe as the paradigm of progress and humanity, and the myth of the non-European as backward and boorish.[15] For Custine, Russia is the other against which Europe will define itself. Not only are Russians reduced to "talented copyists, because they don't have ideas of their own," but Russia (like Greece and the Balkans) are placed off Europe's map. Custine responds to the Russian speaker's awe at seeing Peter the Great, by remarking, "In Asia tyrants are adored. The more terrible the tyrant the more cherished is his memory; Alexander the Great, Timur, and your Peter the Great."

The invisible persona is put in a position of defending Russians and Russian culture, but he also repeats Custine's statements almost like an echo resounding from the walls of these huge rooms. For instance, when Custine (Europe) introduces the topic of nationalism into the dialogue, only to disregard "Russia's national poet," Aleksandr Pushkin, as "nothing special," he adds, "I am sorry if I have offended your nationalist sympathies." The invisible persona questioningly repeats, "What? . . . national . . . national sympathy?" But he does not react further. Instead of simply confronting European criticisms of the "East," the film shows how Russia's sniffing at the various figures of Europe is read by Europe as a slavish act of deference. By allowing the European stranger to assume a superior position, the Russian speaker subtly undermines it, showing that Europe's identity is also an imaginary construction that is contingent on its others, and ironically, it is the Hermitage that houses and preserves the various dreams, memories, and histories of Europe.

Shifting from the framing of historic events and Russian pageantry to the details of various European art works, the film seems to relegate Russia to a series of

The Marquis de Custine commenting on art and history

live performances (history, theater, music, court rituals) and Europe to a collection of artifacts (paintings, sculptures, architectural features, artistic styles). The dialogue between the figures of Europe and Russia and their journey through the time and space of the Hermitage question such clear divisions, making the European's insistence on superiority look ridiculous (especially in contrast to the post-Soviet visitors whom the European encounters). Sokurov pokes fun at Custine, who seems to see his reflection everywhere—"Empire style everywhere"—and whose keen sense of smell does not go beyond the paint of the various European "Old Masters" he sniffs, or the odors (formaldehyde) that his own body exudes. Yet here he mistakes or projects his own stench onto (living) others. The film, however, does not clarify who is right. Is it the present that stinks of death (merely preserving itself on past glory) as the historical figure of the past thinks, or is it the burden of history that reeks of death and oppresses the modern visitors?

Russian Ark parodies not only Europe's proprietary attitude toward the art works featured in the film, but also what they represent. When Custine is introduced to the Russian persona's friends (Sokurov's real-life friends Lev Yeliseyev and Oleg Khmelnisky), he arrogantly asks them if they are interested in "beauty or just the imitation of it?" But as they lead Custine to Tintoretto's *The Nativity of St. John the Baptist,* it is clear that he is not interested in the painting's beauty (as are these two patrons of the museum), but only in what it represents in terms of French history. He comments, in fact, that Catherine the Great acquired the painting at a Paris auction of the Crozat Collection in 1772. Similarly, while overwhelmed by the beauty of Canova's *Three Graces,* he notes that the sculpture was purchased by Czar Alexander I from Napoleon Bonaparte's wife in 1815. In opposition to Custine, the various Russian visitors to the museum (the famous ballet dancer Alla Osipenko, the blind sculptress Tamara Kurenkova, and the anonymous man who admires El Greco's *St. Peter and St. Paul*) develop their own relationship to the works of art independent of the sentiments of nationalism. However, the film constantly reminds us that Custine is many performances in one: he is at the same time Custine, a French diplomat, a European, and a stranger, but he is also a performance of biased European attitudes toward Russia. More importantly, he links this "live" performance of an untimely history to the haunting presence of those outside of time and geopolitical space.

"Europe," who is surprised to hear that he is speaking Russian, is in fact a prominent Russian stage actor (Sergei Donstov) acting the part of the Marquis ("Europe"). But this time, the Marquis de Custine does not enter the palace with a diplomatic entourage as we see with the Persian delegation—sent to persuade Czar Nicholas I not to go to war over the murder of Russian diplomats in Tehran—nor does he appear as stiff and staid as the other diplomats (as surely a French diplomat of the time would). Instead, he is an obvious parody of Europe—flamboyantly delivering French lines with a Russian body. When we first encounter this strange European, he is hovering behind the masquerade actors who greet the party guests, the officers and ladies in the first visual shot of the film. The Russian speaker encounters "Europe" only after passing through two groups of actors, confusing him to the point that he cannot distinguish theatrical performance from historical

The last ball

reenactment. He asks, "Can it be that this has all been staged for me? Am I expected to play a role?" He even asks this stranger, whom he now finds lurking in the hallway, "Is this all theater?"

Yet this allegorical figure of Europe will further extend the metaphor of theater to Russia itself: "Russia is like theater, how pretentious these people are. What actors! And those costumes!" *Russian Ark* draws attention to multiple layers of theatricality. On one level, St. Petersburg and the Winter Palace provide the stage for Russians to act as if they were European: on another level, this artificiality and pretentiousness seem to be imported to Russia from European court culture itself —the disguising of the violence of political and imperial power with etiquette and diplomacy. In addition, history, remembrance, and even the present—as for instance in the case of Osipenko, who acts (dances) out her relationship to Rembrandt's *Danaë*—are played out as cameo performances. Finally, the film's focus on theater draws attention to film as an artistic performance.

Although *Russian Ark* emphasizes theatricality, it doesn't spin it out of control into random, disjointed acts that repeat, intersect, and dissolve into oblivion. Instead the film hinges all these disparate and fragmentary performances on the physical and historical map of the Hermitage and the Winter Palace. The trajectory of "Europe" and "Russia" does not seem to follow any order or chronology. As they move from room to room, they also move from the time of Peter the Great (early eighteenth century) to Catherine the Great (eighteenth century), to various periods in the nineteenth century, contemporary Petrograd, to the siege of Leningrad during WWII, and back to an older and more feeble Catherine the Great (in the late eighteenth century). What appears in chronological order are the various czars, from Peter the Great to Catherine the Great, Nicholas I, and Nicholas II. Each czar played a significant role in the history of the museum: Peter the Great not only founded the city, but also constructed the first incarnation of the Winter Palace and the museum, which was then a Kunstkammer, library, and natural history museum for his Academy of Sciences. Catherine the Great was the founder of the Hermitage, and bought over 250 paintings in 1764 to begin the collection. Czar Nicholas I opened the New Hermitage in 1852 and provided "public" access to the museum. The reign of Nicholas II marks the end of the Hermitage's double role as museum and home to the czars. It also marks the end of the epoch of Petrine reforms, and what the film presents as the splitting of Russia from Europe during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods.

The film mimics this historical progression by moving upwards from the original darkness through the dark quarters of Peter the Great to the brilliantly colorful climactic ball given by Nicholas II, only to descend once again into the darkened waters of the Neva. This movement from the small provincial courtrooms of Peter the Great to the opulent high-ceilinged ballrooms of Czar Nicholas I's court and Czar Nicholas II's gala ballroom also marks the growth of the city and the Empire's geopolitical importance with respect to Europe. As opposed to the fluid movement of the camera, which follows the rhythm of the dancers, musicians, and various guests at the ball, the images of Peter I are tightly framed. He is seen through windows and doorways. Often the ceiling can be seen in the frame, giving the images a claustrophobic effect. This image alludes to Pushkin's famous characterization of St. Petersburg as "opening a window onto Europe" in his poem "The Bronze Horseman" ("Mednyi Vsadnik," 1833). Ironically, here it is the figure of Europe and the Russian speaker who apprehensively peek through the window at Peter I—but a Peter stripped of the trappings of enlightened despotism. Through these windows we see Peter physically bully his wife (Catherine I) and humiliate one of his ministers by forcing him to the ground and making him crawl out of his presence. This scene enacts the hypocrisy of the Petrine reforms that used public humiliations and state intrusion to introduce Russians into "polite society." The window also serves as a barrier to keep Peter at a distance. He is treated as an enigma.[16] The man who, in popular culture, taught the Russians to enjoy themselves—popular folklore tells us that he threw wild, drunken parties and demonstrated extraordinary sexual prowess—is also the man who, as Custine reminds the Russian speaker, ordered his own son's execution.

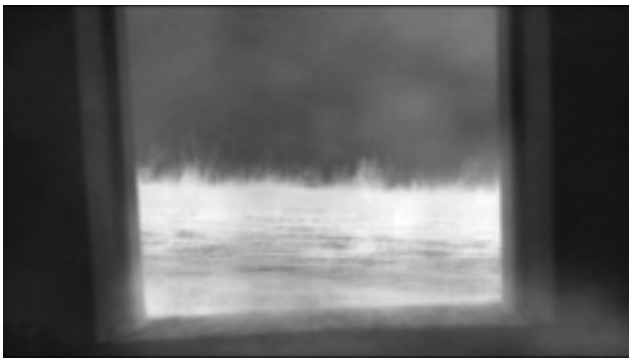
Boym writes:

> For Russian thinkers, the "window to the West" turned into a magic mirror in which they

> saw mostly their own reflections. Conversely, Russia was an exotic playground for Western travelers, "the land of the firebird" or tyranny in the 19th century, and the land of possible communist utopia, or alternatively of the totalitarian gulag.[17]

But the film is not uncritical of the Russian gaze through a European window at itself. The city, like the very foundations of the Hermitage and the history of the St. Petersburg czars, is built on top of this boorish figure of Peter the Great. Catherine, the great patron of the arts who launched this Russian ark, is presented less boorishly. First she appears watching a rather garish theatrical play (presumably her own production) that mixes classical Roman and Russian figures with masquerade and fantasy characters. Alone among the czars she has a second appearance, yet in her reappearance she is a somewhat pathetic figure, hiding behind a column as the children of the court play blindman's bluff. This time, she is almost unrecognizable to the disembodied visitor. But both times she is shown running off—first, she claims, "to take a piss," while the other time she disappears into the cold white-and-grey world outside the palace. As the film progresses and the art, as Custine claims, "gets better and better," the czars appear less active, almost ridiculously immobile.

Nicholas I walks down two steps so as to indicate that he is receiving the address of the Persian ambassador, and then turns to his minister to indicate that the words the minister will read are his own. It is almost as if he has become a European clockwork figurine. In this scene it is the camera that becomes more fluid, moving through the tableau of a historical festival, giving this image a three-dimensional feel. The contrast between cinematic fluidity and figural stasis is repeated in the scene of Nicholas II presiding at the head of an intimate family breakfast in full ceremonial dress. But already by the time we follow Czarina Alexandra and her sister Elizabeth (the "white nun" who was also killed by the Bolsheviks in 1918) down the hallway, there is a foreboding specter of doom looming beyond the walls of the Winter Palace.[18] When Alexandra comes into focus, it is as if we hear her thoughts: "You are always there watching me." Later she will ask Elizabeth if she hears the gunshots, and tell her that she feels the presence of someone watching. Of course there are many spectators watching—not only Europe, but Russia and the camera itself. As the camera pulls away from the family, they seem to bid it farewell. The invisible speaker will echo this gesture as he bids farewell to Europe at the top of the Jordan stairs on his descent into the future—



The waters of the Neva

World War I, the Revolution, Stalinism, WWII, the Cold War and its anti-climactic finale.

At this point of closure, the last image of the czars, the invisible speaker loses sight of his European accomplice, following first the white nun and then the awkward yet ever-present spy into the ballroom. The European becomes increasingly more embroiled in the spectacle of the past, and less engaged in the antagonistic dialogue with the invisible Russian speaker. This disengagement produces a feeling of weightlessness. The camera and the speaker appear to be more disembodied, gliding through the ballroom, floating above the orchestra and around the dance floor. Yet, just as the camera and the speaker seem to be swept away by the music and the festivities, there is a loss of grounding that will leave the invisible speaker with a sense of melancholy and disorientation once the music stops. As he approaches "Europe" for the last time he remarks, "I lost you," and repeats, "Have I lost you?" as if to indicate that not only is he lost, but so is this era of opulence, splendor, and power. When he suggests to "Europe," "Let's go . . . forward," his European companion, visibly saddened, responds by asking, "What will we find there?" The future to which the Russian speaker refers is not the Russian Revolution, but an unknown future beyond the Soviet period.

Rather than remaining with "Europe" like an artifact fixed within a historical frame, the Russian speaker follows the moving spectacle down the stairs, but he becomes one with the camera that moves between and beyond these historical figures, only to float through this window to Europe and onto the desolate waters of the Neva. Like Pushkin's "The Bronze Horseman," the film takes a sudden twist from the monumental heights of the ark (island) of the czar to the surface of the Neva.[19] It is here over the water that the disembodied speaker reflects, "Too bad you are not here with me, you would understand everything; look, the sea is all around and we are destined to sail forever . . . to live forever." While

the film closes with another nebulous image—the darkened winter sky of St. Petersburg over the frozen waters of the Neva—it recalls these anonymous "eternal people" who seem to sail undetected between the borders of Asia and Europe, within the borders of someone else's dreams of an unforeseeable future and an impossible past, between the secularism of Enlightenment thought and the return of religion, lost somewhere in the exchange of ideology for international currency. Sokurov seems to be as unwilling to identify these floating people as he is to anchor them on one bank or the other. What he does emphasize is the rift between the aesthetics of Russia's monumental idols, history, and politics of empire and the murky, imageless (if not invisible) eternal people over whom all these spectacular images pass.

NOTES

I would like to thank Mario Biagioli and Robert Dulgarian for their careful reading and smart comments on this essay.

1. Etienne Balibar, *We the People of Europe?* trans. James Swenson (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004). See Chapter 1, "At the Borders of Europe."
2. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1983) and Stathis Gourgouris, *Dream Nation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).
3. Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* (one of the first texts written in vulgar idiom) begins: "In mezzo del cammin di nostra vita/mi ritrovai in una selva oscura/che la diritta vita era smarrita/ . . . Perdete ogni speranza o voi che entrate."
4. Dragan Kujundzić, "After 'After': The Arkive Fever of Alexander Sokurov," *Art Margins,* Spring 2003, www.artmargins.com/content/cineview/kujundzic/html. This essay is also republished in *Quarterly Review of Film and Video,* vol. 21, no. 3 (July-September 2004): 219-39. Although the film has been widely reviewed, there has been little serious analysis. Kujundzić's piece not only stands out amongst the literature, but also sets a high bar for further examination of the film.
5. Svetlana Boym, "From the Russian Soul to Post-Communist Nostalgia," *Representations* 49 (Winter 1995): 145.
6. For a reading of the notion of spirit and nation as a performance of sacred, see Raoul Eshelman's "Sokurov's *Russian Ark* and the End of Postmodernism," *Art Margins,* Summer 2003, www.artmargins.com/content/cineview/eshelman/html.
7. Anatoly M. Khazanov, "Ethnic Nationalism in the Russian Federation," *Dædalus,* vol. 126, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 130-38.
8. Ironically, it was Peter the Great who curtailed the power of the Orthodox Church in his Spiritual Regulations of 1721 and subordinated the church to a secular government bureau, the Holy Synod.
9. Gourgouris, *Dream Nation*, 45.
10. Stanley Kauffman, "Remembrances," *New Republic* (December 16, 2002): 26.
11. Kujundzić, "After 'After.'"
12. Michael Gordin, "The Importation of Being Ernest: The Early St. Petersburg Academy of Science," *Isis* 91 (2000): 16. Gordin observes: "Peter's court was Western only in the sense that it was patterned after the Baroque courts of late 16th century Italy: it centered on ceremony, emblems, and panegyrics in a manner not seen in Western Europe since the golden age of Florence. This 'cultural lag time' has been attributed to the fact that Russia has imported its courtly culture from German states, which were themselves behind France, Italy and England." He argues, "The purpose of Peter's reforms were to create a new class of the Russian 'elite,' which primarily entailed education . . . borrowed from the Berlin Academy of Science, but despite Peter's gestures toward social mobility, this civilizing process was not meant to go all the way down the social ladder. . . . He merely wanted it to appear estate-blind, in effect these reforms were meant to form a new class formation" (11-13). See also Marc Raetf, "Seventeenth Century Europe in Eighteenth Century Russia," *Slavic Review* 41 (1982): 611-19.
13. See the work of Norbert Elias, *Power and Civility: The Civilizing Process,* vol. 2, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Pantheon, 1982) and *The Court Society,* trans. Jephcott (New York: Pantheon, 1983).
14. William Johnson, "Russian Ark," *Film Quarterly,* vol. 57, no. 2 (Winter 2003-04): 48.
15. Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).
16. Peter I is presented as somewhat of a stranger himself. While he humiliates one of his nobles, we hear the invisible speaker say, "He was obviously a foreigner, why would he be so rude otherwise," seemingly in reference to the European figure. Of course many of the czars were "foreigners," in that like all European aristocracy, they came from various noble houses (in this case, mainly German and Prussian) outside of their own empire. But here we are asked to think about Peter's distaste for all things Russian, his brutal treatment of Russian nobility, the Orthodox Church, and his attraction to, if not identification with, Europe. If Peter is the keel to this Russian ark, then what does it mean to be Russian?
17. Boym, "From the Russian Soul," 149.
18. The film replaces the controversial spiritual advisor of Aleksandra, Grigorii Rasputin, with Elizabeth, so as to further legitimize the royal house.
19. "The Bronze Horseman" juxtaposes the great monuments and feats of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great to a lowly bureaucratic functionary, Yevgeny, who takes refuge under the statue of Peter the Great during the great flood of 1824. The poem shifts from the praise of the city to the story of Yevgeny going mad once he realizes that his sweetheart has perished during the flood, and it follows his madness, anger, death, and burial in a pauper's (unmarked) grave.

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ABSTRACT This paper analyzes how Aleksandr Sokurov's Russian Ark treats the complex relationship of Russia and Europe, considering their history not as a fact but as a poetic construction. The film demonstrates how nostalgia for an imaginary past often produces various forms of historical erasure and national myths of origin.

■ **Joanna E. Rapf**

DOING NOTHING

Harry Langdon and the Performance of Absence

Only a public sensitive to the brilliance of surrealism could penetrate into the sleep of the poet, Harry Langdon.

—*Ado Kyrou,* Le Surréalisme au cinéma[1]

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Harry Langdon hesitant in *The Strong Man*

OF THE FOUR CANONIZED EARLY screen comics, Harry Langdon is probably the strangest and least known today. Joyce Rheuban, who has written the only thorough analysis of Langdon to date (and her book is over 20 years old), carefully argues, "Langdon is the author of a highly original comic conception which, within the richest period in the history of American film comedy, distinguishes his work in every respect from that of his contemporaries."[2]

It is worth noting that Rheuban describes Langdon as the "author" of his comedy. Part of the reason for Langdon's neglect today undoubtedly has to do with Frank Capra's damning assessment of him in his self-serving autobiography, *Frank Capra: The Name Above the Title*. Capra directed two of Langdon's features, *The Strong Man* (1926) and *Long Pants* (1927), and takes credit for much of *Tramp, Tramp, Tramp* (1926), for which he did the story (but Harry Edwards directed). Capra lambastes Langdon, calling him "an impossible, opinionated, conceited, strutting little jerk," a comic of limited range who did not understand his character nor what made him great, which we are to assume was the genius of Frank Capra.[3] It is a cruel portrait, and one that Rheuban convincingly discredits in her careful study of Langdon's art, where she shows that the comic created his distinctive performance style as early as 1906. She writes: "There is a clear continuity between Langdon's work in films and his prefilm work as a comic performer."[4] Even Gerald Mast, not a huge fan of Langdon, recognizes that "the evidence is not so clear" that Frank Capra made him a star and that without

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Capra his career declined.[5] There are certainly what we later have come to recognize as Capra-esque elements in Langdon's comedy—the focus on the goodness of small-town people as opposed to the greedy and the selfish, for example—but Capra does not own populism. Rheuban sees versatile writer, editor, director of photography, and director Arthur Ripley as having had as much influence on Langdon as Capra, an influence that leads her to recognize a sinister undertone in many of his films, even suggesting they might be seen as "black comedies."[6] Beginning with *All Night Long* in 1924, Ripley has a story credit on 15 Langdon films. While Capra left Langdon in 1927 after *Long Pants,* Ripley continued with the comedian on *His First Flame* (1927), *Three's a Crowd* (1927), *The Chaser* (1928), and *Heart Trouble* (1928).

Unlike Capra, Ripley had a dark view of life, reflected in his later films such as *Waterfront* (1939), in which a tough product of the docks almost kills his bride while looking for his brother's murderer, or the grim *Voice in the Wind* (1944), which deals with the robbing and drowning of refugees from Hitler's Germany. Although Langdon made just seven silent features, all between 1926 and 1928, Rheuban astutely notes that only one of those, *Tramp, Tramp, Tramp,* can be said to have "a happy, 'healthy' ending," and this is the only one that did not involve Ripley.[7]

Capra was simply wrong in his insistence that the key to the Langdon character was innocence and a narrative built around the idea of "think no evil, see no evil, or do no evil."[8] Rather, Langdon's baby-faced persona places him in a pre-moral world, before adult consciousness has set in. Rheuban calls him "amoral," while Raymond Durgnat talks about the "perversities" at the core of his innocence, and James Agee describes him as a "baby dope fiend."[9] A character who plots to kills his fiancée so he can run off with a dope-dealing vamp, as Langdon does in *Long Pants,* hardly "thinks no evil." In his amoral world, murder may be no more sinister than reading a library book and fantasizing that he is Don Juan. This kind of innocence, oblivious to the expectations of civilized society, puts the Langdon persona squarely in the Surrealist camp, seemingly capable of the archetypal Surrealist act of shooting people randomly in the street.

The essence of the comic technique of this unpredictable, bewildered, ambiguous man/child who, as William Schelly has commented, "never seemed very far from the womb," is the small gesture: a quick punch, a sly glance, and a deliciously slow blink.[10] Mast has written of this look: "The frozen Langdon face and the deliberate blink of those carefully lined eyes produce a truly infantile perplexity."[11] Walter Kerr suggests that "there was a dent in his hat that suggested a dent in his brain" (also a punning reference to one of his favorite co-stars, Vernon Dent).[12] This character often seems stupid, helpless, immature, with a body like "a soft cream puff, a foam-rubber pillow, a mass of jelly."[13] Whereas other visual comedians *did* things, Langdon's trick was to do very little or NOTHING. For example, in *Seven Chances* (1925), when Buster Keaton is chased by runaway boulders, he runs down a hill, keeping ahead of them with his speed and acrobatic agility. In a similar gag in *Tramp, Tramp, Tramp,* Langdon just rides a fence board like a sled to get away.

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Langdon with Joan Crawford in *Tramp, Tramp, Tramp*

David Everitt, in a recent review of the Kino release of several of Langdon's films on DVD, describes him simply as "a comic who did nothing but did it in a hilarious way."[14] This sounds a little like descriptions of TV's "Seinfeld," the "comedy about nothing." In *Comedy/Cinema/Theory,* Andrew Horton quotes Jacques Derrida: "To risk meaning nothing is to start to play."[15] And play is behind so much of the comic impulse, including the way "Seinfeld" and Langdon turn our expectations upside down by, paradoxically, allowing nothing to happen. In *Long Pants,* although Langdon plots his fiancée's murder, he fails to carry it out. Play allows us to break with social conventions, to do the unexpected, which in some cases might be to do nothing.

Jerry Seinfeld, of course, was not the first comedian to discover the humor in nothingness. William Shakespeare wrote *Much Ado About Nothing* about 400 years earlier, and the "nothingnesses" of both "Seinfeld" and

Shakespeare have an affinity with Langdon's, reminding us of the significance of the insignificant. To emphasize the seemingly little and unimportant things in life, to make standing in line for a table at a Chinese restaurant the basis for an entire episode of "Seinfeld," is a reversal of expectations, and such reversal is often the basis for laughter. We expect something to happen, but Jerry, George, and Elaine never get a table, and at the end of the episode, more irritated and hungry than at the beginning, they leave. Nothing significant has happened; life has gone on. Comedy is, as Susanne Langer reminds us, about enduring.[16] In *Tramp, Tramp, Tramp,* Langdon finds himself lost, off the road, and surrounded by a herd of sheep. A Keaton or a Chaplin would make a gag out of this; Langdon does nothing. In film after film we find him in the corner of the frame, seated, hunched over, hidden. In *Long Pants*, he is a mute, motionless witness to a vicious fight between two women. He sits with his back to the camera, like an audience, observing the fight. A crowd rushes into the small room in response to gunshots. No one notices Harry. He does nothing, no one responds to him, and he eventually retreats from the chaos.

Langdon is characteristically ignored within his films, as if he weren't there. His is a comedy of absence. While the great silent clowns Chaplin, Keaton, and Harold Lloyd liked to work center frame and full figure, Langdon always seems self-conscious when standing full in the frame. The way he is introduced in his films often reflects this. Following on Lloyd's *The Freshman* (1925) and anticipating Keaton's *College* (1927), Harry Langdon, in *His First Flame,* plays Harry, the valedictorian of his college class. But he is first revealed *behind* a door, adjusting the suspenders on his socks. Exposed, he crawls out of the frame, and when he finally enters the auditorium for his speech and we see him full figure, he puts his hand to his mouth awkwardly (one of his favorite gestures), and then sits down. His reluctance to take center stage as graduation speaker anticipates that of Jerry Lewis's character at the beginning of *The Ladies' Man.* Lewis's infantile persona and sexual immaturity in some ways resemble Langdon's, although Lewis went at top speed while Langdon's hysteria is silent and often painfully slow.

The introduction of Langdon in *Long Pants* stresses his reticence even more, for he is entirely *absent* from the frame. We only see the door of a library open. We know someone has entered, but we don't see him. Instead, a disembodied hand takes books about romance off the shelves. It is not until we get to the attic of his parents' house (he goes up the ladder to that attic unseen; the camera tilts up but we do not see a body) that

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we at last see Harry, *sitting behind* a chest reading and fantasizing about life rather than participating in its reality. And when we finally see him full figure, he scratches his head in puzzlement.

Langdon's films are filled with scenes like these, with him retreating from life, running off the screen, curled in a fetal position, or transposed into the world of dreams. In one of his first shorts in 1924, *All Night Long,* he is introduced asleep in a theater during a performance of *Parlor, Bedroom, and Bath.* C. W. Bell's play was adapted to the screen by June Mathis in 1920, so presumably this is the comic film that put Harry to sleep, a bit of reflexive irony. But it is also ironic, in hindsight, that *Parlor, Bedroom, and Bath* was remade

in 1931 with two other great comics of the 1920s, Buster Keaton and Charlotte Greenwood.

Because his persona is regressive, a character whose focus is not of this world and who would seem to prefer to return to the womb rather than enter into a heterosexual relationship, Langdon's narratives do not progress in the usual comic manner of boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl. Although many of his films may seem to have this romantic quest as a narrative spine, in fact most of them end very much as they begin, with the exception, discussed below, of *The Strong Man,* with its blind ingénue. In *Long Pants* he is back in the womb of his family; in *Saturday Afternoon* (1926) he is back in the protective custody of his wife; in *Lucky Stars* (1925) he's as lost at the end as he is at the beginning; while in *Tramp, Tramp, Tramp* he even succeeds in becoming his own infant. We do not get the comic affirmation of regeneration in Langdon. The fact that his persona seems to contradict an Oedipal resolution, with some form of socially sanctioned heterosexual relationship, would suggest that his comedy is not only pre-Oedipal, but also closer to the anarchic forms of farce or slapstick.

The big difference, however, between Langdon's form of comedy and that of the Keystone Kops, for example, is that he emphasizes stasis rather than movement. His is a non-generative comic style that is all about what might be called "performance." Performance covets immediacy, delights in virtuosity, and captures the resonance of the moment and the timeless realm of dreams. In some ways it is the difference between art for humanity's sake (Chaplin, perhaps) and "art for art's sake." In this, Langdon's eloquent pauses are akin to what we experience when listening to music, where we are not concerned with pushing through to an end, where we revel in the beauty and artistry of the moment, in a flow that does not have to take us anywhere in particular. It is, of course, meaningful that we use the word "play" to refer to both the act of making music and participating in games. Neither activity needs to involve a direct trajectory toward a specific goal, although each does have an end. The connection is illustrated by Friedrich Nietzsche in a quotation used by Mark T. Conard in his discussion of the unique content of "Seinfeld": "Not every end is a goal. The end of a melody is not its goal; but nonetheless, if the melody had not reached its end it would not have reached its goal either."[17]

This virtuoso performance technique is strikingly demonstrated in Langdon's films during long scenes in which absolutely nothing happens. Although Mack Sennett, who once called Langdon "the greatest of them all," said that the comedian knew "less about stories and motion picture techniques than perhaps any other screen star," this is undoubtedly because he did not relate to the unique, ambiguous slow style, capturing the performer "always halfway between here and there."[18] In fact, as Rheuban notes, comments by both Sennett and Capra on the production of the film indicate that whether as performer or performer/director, Langdon was the "metteur-en-scène," and that he provided the "formative influence on the temporal structure of his films."[19] Sennett, in his famous interview with Theodore Dreiser, remarked that Langdon had "his own ideas, exactly, of how everything should be done."[20]

The conception of his comic persona and style that Langdon brought from vaudeville was conducive to a cinematic form that preserves conditions of spatiotemporal unity, a form that has since been labeled mise-en-scène. Joyce Rheuban makes the excellent point that the kind of editing we see in Keaton and Chaplin, where cuts are used to establish pace, or to focus on a reaction shot, would be totally inappropriate for Langdon's style. He is truly a mise-en-scène filmmaker whose routines need to unfold in the real time and real space that can make them seem excessively protracted. Rheuban writes:

> Editing as it is employed in Langdon's film is not montage. Character, comedy, and pathos are not created by relationships between shots, but reside in the *mise-en-scène*—in Harry's relationship, in terms of placement and timing, to some fact of life, antagonist, or alternative.[21]

Langdon liked the long, durational take, but unlike Chaplin or Keaton, he uses long shots that are filled with hesitancies, indecisions, moments of retreat, wobbly-kneed failures. Frank Thompson has talked about his "interminable indecisiveness."[22] There is a beautiful example of this in *Long Pants.* Harry has been fooled into believing that a ventriloquist's dummy sitting on a box in which his vamp girlfriend is hiding is a real policeman and tries to attract "his" attention. The sidewalk and curb function as a kind of stage on which Harry performs a series of gags to *two* audiences: the audience of the film and the dummy policeman—the audience *he thinks* is watching him from across the street. The take goes on for several minutes without a cut until Harry realizes he has been performing for a dummy.

As a filmmaker, Langdon liked to exploit the uniqueness of the medium of film by creating gags that involve performing for more than one audience at a time. These "performances" have nothing to do with

progressing the narrative, but they have everything to do with his performance style. In *The Strong Man* he performs for an audience within the film, while in *Tramp, Tramp, Tramp* he appears in a newsreel watched by an audience that includes his father. In this film, Harry is to participate in a cross-country race to promote Burton Shoes, and we are shown its beginning in the newsreel. Once again, we see Harry's characteristic reluctance to be filmed. He wants to kiss his girl, played by a young Joan Crawford, so he tries to wave the camera away to get some privacy. When it keeps filming he, as usual, tries to run off-screen. But his girl pulls him back and reminds him of the importance of the filming. This scene, as Steve Seidman has noted, self-referentially calls attention to the filmmaking process itself by giving us two different temporal actions that seem to transpire at the same time: the newsreel projected and the newsreel being filmed.[23]

Walter Kerr has said of Langdon that he "found a way to renew the energies of silent film comedy by acting out their absence."[24] Raymond Durgnat wrote that the comedian "gropes, from some virginal limbo, over the threshold of our mad, half real world, opening up weird spaces and emptiness all around himself and within us."[25] He incarnates our alienation from reality. His surreal evocation of absence is a rejection of the so-called "real" physical world in favor of a fantasy world of dreams. If Surrealism is all about visualizing the impulses of the unconscious, an investigation of dreams, an expression of repressed desire through various forms of violence and sex, then Langdon may rightly, as Durgnat and Kyrou both suggest, be claimed by the Surrealists as one of their own.[26]

He sleeps and dreams, and in this surreality he gives us the fulfillment of his desires so repressed in his tight, infantile, pasty body. Intertextually, he exploits the idea of desire by giving us a two-reel comedy version of Eugene O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms,* a play first produced in 1924, in the now lost *His New Mama,* which was also released in 1924. And Langdon uses the title of the play in a close-up in *Long Pants,* when he drops the book at the moment he first sees the dark-haired vamp who is to be his undoing. *Long Pants* also contains an intense dream of repressed desire in which Harry imagines taking his soon-to-be bride into the woods and killing her so that he can run off with the dark, disreputable, criminal vamp who has won his innocent heart.

The presence of these vamps in Langdon's comedies is another aspect of his work that distinguishes him from his more famous comic contemporaries. Because his character embodies what might be called traditionally feminine traits—invisibility, passivity, and silence—some of the best moments of his comedy occur when he is juxtaposed with his opposite: women who are visible, active, noisy. These women are not the central love interests in his films. They are the secondary female comic characters who embody a transgressive power that serves to bring out male sexual anxiety. They are also associated—through various traits such as ethnic origin, urban existence, and connection with criminality and money—with destabilizing, threatening elements within American society itself. These elements serve for brilliant moments of comedy in the middle sections of his films, but in the end these vamps simply disappear from the story, and Harry is established or reestablished within the status quo of the recognized progression of the narrative, usually at home with a girl named Mary.

Langdon's silent film career was remarkably brief, from the short *Pickling Peaches* in 1924 to the feature *The Chaser* in 1928: about five years. During this period American culture was changing dramatically with respect to the roles of women both at home and in the workplace. It was the age of the flapper, shorter skirts, shorter hair, and increasing sexual and economic freedom. In the Jazz Age of F. Scott Fitzgerald, erotic life assumed "a new, distinctive importance in the consciousness of some Americans."[27] The life-draining female vampire of the Victorian era, the objectification of male fears of the sexual power women, was transformed in the early twentieth century into simply "the vamp," still a controlling, potent sexual figure and a threat to bourgeois hegemonic structures, but one whose power was not quite so threatening.[28] She could be subdued, or the male hero could escape her grasp and return to the safety of the domestic sphere.

The vamp figure that appears again and again in Harry Langdon's films is consistently associated with criminality and represents the threat of the visible, active woman. Diane Negra sees her as "a particularly potent marker of the cultural transition from viewing women's sexuality in need of regulation for its own sake to a deep investment in that process of control and regulation to bolster patriarchal norms."[29] It is, of course, questionable whether or not Langdon and his writers intended to use her as such a "potent marker," although the fact that she appears prominently in the dramatic films of the 20s as well as in Langdon's comedies probably says something about her as a cultural sign. Negra also discusses the iconography of the vamp as a necessary counterpoint to the iconography of female victimization that was popularized by filmmakers such as

D.W. Griffith.[30] In the case of Langdon, however, one might make the case that the iconography of the vamp was necessary as a counterpoint to his victimization as a baby-faced innocent.

In writing about what he called "the serious side of comedy making" in December of 1927 for *Theatre* magazine, Langdon himself (or his ghost writer, possibly Arthur Ripley) quoted Henri Bergson almost verbatim in discussing the four greatest stimuli to laughter: "rigidity, automatism, absentmindedness and unsociability."[31] Laughter lies in the contrast between the flow of life and its mechanical interruption. "Contrasts" are key here. In "Jokes and the Comic," Sigmund Freud similarly described what is "essential to the comic" as "a contrast between ideas."[32] Langdon, however, exploits Freud's idea of contrast in reverse—Langdon always seems to be going in reverse. Freud said we laugh when an expenditure of bodily energy is too large or extravagant—like the actions of a clown—but Langdon gives us energy that is too little. Freud was wrong when he argued that we "no longer laugh" when a "person's physical expenditure is found to be less than ours."[33] Langdon's expenditure is almost always "less than ours," but we laugh at the contrast between his rigidity, automatism, absentmindedness, and inaction, and the sensuous, conniving, and active qualities of the women with whom he is often paired.

In slapstick comedy, "the girl" was usually just a beautiful but quiet excuse for male action. But with a comedian who is *not* active, but rather hesitant, regressive, and frightened, the women against whom he plays are going to be his opposite: aggressive, assertive, even at times so monstrous it is understandable that poor Harry would want to run out of the frame. His attraction to sexually dominating women is indicative of his desire to negate self, to disappear into the safe world of the womb away from the conflicts that come with adult self-consciousness and sexuality.

Lucky Stars, a short produced in 1925, is a good early example of how Langdon escapes the threat of the exotic vamp. In this film, Harry is on the road with a medicine show, following a fortuneteller's prediction that he will "take a long journey and fall in love with a dark woman." In the small town where they are selling their phony medicine, he thinks he sees that "dark woman" —the local druggist's daughter, Señorita Mazda, played by Natalie Kingston. A title card reminds us of the prediction of the "dark woman," and a POV shot shows that Harry is looking at an African-American woman who smiles at him invitingly. It is the kind of racial joke that is not uncommon in early film, but the juxtaposition of the ethnic Señorita Mazda and the African-American woman links them both as marginalized figures, outsiders who are a threat to the white male's ability to provide for himself and his family. In this case, Señorita Mazda is a literal threat because she tries to kill Harry in a mock seduction with a phallic knife deliciously slipped into its hiding place between her stocking and her leg. Langdon, in typical fashion, rather than succumbing sexually, curls up in her lap like a baby, only to be rescued just in time as his partner calls him away.

Natalie Kingston, perhaps best known for the role of Jane in the 1929 *Tarzan the Tiger,* played an exotic temptress in many silent films, including several of Langdon's. She is a French seductress in *All Night Long,* has a bit part in *Long Pants,* and a more substantial role in *His First Flame* as the cold, callous, gold-digging Ethel Morgan, with whom Harry is in love at the beginning of the film. She is described as "in love with herself," a characteristic typical of the vamp, whose self-absorption is inevitably a threat to family unity. Visually, this self-absorption is manifested by an emphasis on make-up, clothing, and images of the female figure primping in front of a mirror. In *His First Flame,* Ethel's sister, the omnipresent "Mary," described by a title card as "sweet and romantic," is obviously the more suitable match for Harry in terms of preserving family, economic stability, and socially constructed gender roles. But it is the socially deviant woman, juxtaposed to Harry's innocence, who makes for most of the comedy in the film. After we have been introduced to Ethel and Mary, Harry encounters two shoplifters while trying to recover an engagement ring he has bought for Ethel. One of the thieves is a woman, and as in *Lucky Stars,* she is in the film only for this comic episode and then drops out. When the thief runs from the store, Harry runs after her and typically out of the frame. Langdon's desire to disappear or melt away is consistently shown in his films as he bends his knees slightly in an attempt to sit, often when he should be standing, or as he abruptly tries to move from the camera's line of sight.

In *His First Flame* we have a brilliant rendering of this push toward absence and also the destabilization that comes from the inversion of gender roles: the invisible man and the visible woman. The shoplifter dashes from view through a doorway. Harry stops in the doorway and literally cannot stand straight. He tilts slowly back and forth several times and then falls out of the frame. The woman reemerges dressed as a man (and in Harry's clothes she is much more masculine than he is), while he reemerges in her clothes. But as a woman, he cannot "support" himself at all; he has to lean against the doorway, and he finally falls out of the frame again.

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Saving the girl in *His First Flame*

The whole narrative of *Long Pants* is a striking illustration of both the role of the vamp in Langdon's films and how she serves as a catalyst for his evocation of disengagement from life. In this film, Harry lives in a fantasy world of sexual conquest, reflected in the opening shot when his disembodied hand pulls *Don Juan* down from the library shelf. In reality, his mother does not even want to let him out of his boyish short pants. On his birthday, his father convinces the over-protective mother to let their son wear long pants. The new clothes give him a sense of masculine empowerment. He is standing outside with his bicycle holding a book when he first sees "the vamp," Bebe Blair (played by Alma Bennett). She is not only a vamp but also a dope smuggler (another of Langdon's criminal women on the run from the law, like the shoplifter in *His First Flame* and Lily in *The Strong Man*). Harry's infatuation with Bebe is immediate. He drops the book, which turns out to be *Desire Under the Elms,* and tries to attract her attention. He stands center frame, awkwardly shifting positions in order to be noticed, even trying to swing his leg alluringly over the handlebars of his bicycle. But as much as he tries to be the object of her gaze, she does not see him. The shots of Bebe show her looking right through where Harry should be. Even when present in the frame, he embodies absence; he is not seen by his audience (Bebe) within the film.

Harry is supposed to marry the good girl, played by Priscilla Bonner, but he is so *blindly* infatuated with Bebe that he plots the murder of his fiancée in that surreal sequence of repressed desire mentioned above. He will kill Priscilla in order not to have to marry her and to be able to help the dark vamp, who is now in jail. His father, of course, is outraged at his son's resistance to the appropriate wedding. A title card tells us: "You've read so many books you think you're Don Juan! Well, no son of mine is going to be a vampire!" Harry as a vamp is an ultimate incongruity, no less absurd than a puppy in a pit-bull fighting ring. In the final scene with Bebe, he sits with his back to the camera and watches

her fight with her rival. When she turns and walks towards him, there is a cut so he is removed completely from the lower portion of the frame and we only see her as she seductively approaches him.

What we have here is a female who is too visible juxtaposed with a male who seems to be invisible or does not want to be seen. This idea of invisibility (*not seeing* or not being seen) as essentially feminine is strikingly illustrated in films with blind ingénues. In *City Lights,* as William Paul has pointed out, the Chaplin character loves the blind girl "precisely because she is blind."[34] Sight is connected with power, an argument Mary Ann Doane and others have elaborated in discussing female spectatorship, so when the blind girl gains her sight at the end of *City Lights,* the Tramp is in some ways emasculated. Paul notes that he even loses his cane. In *The Strong Man,* Langdon's character has a reverse revelation, discovering towards the end that the "Mary" with whom he has been in love is in fact blind.

Frank Thompson has commented that this Mary is the first woman in almost the entire Langdon canon "who is totally at ease with him."[35] But Thompson does not seem to recognize that her blindness renders the Langdon character as she imagines him, not as he is. Blindness had the same result in *City Lights.* The Tramp is empowered as long as the girl cannot see him. In the end, in a scene of unspeakable poignancy, he discovers she has regained her sight, whereas Langdon discovers that his girl is blind. With her unable to see him, he becomes what she imagines, an active male figure. He saves her town and even takes on the archetypal roles of patriarchal law: policeman and husband. Although the ending undercuts these roles by having him stumble off a curb and having Mary not go home as ordered, but rather, take his arm to help him, their unity as a couple stands in dramatic contrast to the more familiar victimized persona we saw earlier in the *Strong Man,* where Langdon was vamped by Lily of Broadway (played by Gertrude Astor).

Of all Langdon's vamps, Astor is probably the best known for the type, having starred in such films as *Vamping the Vamp* in 1918 and *The Torrent* in 1924. Like Greenwood, Astor was tall—5′8″—and was therefore not suitable for ingénue parts. Alan Dale reports that "the physical limits on stardom were so openly known and accepted that a publicity photo of Astor blandly bears a caption informing us that she's 'beautiful and clever, but just three inches too tall to be a star.'"[36] In *The Strong Man,* she puts a wad of ill-gotten cash in Langdon's coat to keep the law from finding it and must then "vamp" him to retrieve it. After she finally gets him to her hotel room, she hits him on the head, and he collapses into his famous fetal position, comfortably oblivious to the threat of the external world. When he revives, he thinks she is raping him, and the high camera angle here reinforces his sense of victimization. As he flees, she pursues him with a knife, rape now replaced with the fear of castration. He eventually escapes, and Lily has no further function in the narrative.

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Vamped by Gertrude Astor in *The Strong Man*

The threat of sex and violence embodied in vamps like Lily, the repressed desire that, like a buoyant ball, refuses to remain submerged, pushing to the surface to motivate Harry's brief bursts of action, are at the heart of these comedies. But the action is short-lived, leaving his character stuck between a start and a stop. In contrast to his more active, virile contemporaries—Keaton, Lloyd, and even Chaplin—Langdon's infantile persona evokes a "Nowhere Man" (to quote from the Beatles), a haunting absence and silence that in some ways recall Samuel Beckett. Like the main character in Beckett's *Film* (1965), who explores Bishop Berkeley's idea that "to be is to be perceived," Langdon often seems to want to cease to be by escaping perception. His desire to retreat from the action of the frame, from an engagement with life, speaks with an eerie resonance to our postmodern world. In his comic routines with his reified other, the vamp, he paradoxically visualizes absence, what Ado Kyrou talked of as the "sleep of the poet," a world outside of time and space. But Langdon himself, a man whose off-screen intelligence displayed a maturity that contradicted his screen persona, also realized that comedy has its origin in our self-consciousness and

our awareness of mortality, and in our recognition that the road from the peace of the womb to the peace of the grave is filled with pain. In the 1927 essay quoted earlier, he wrote: "The most deliciously comic moments on the outside, are full of sad significance for those who realize the sinister characterizations of the situation."[37] A baby-faced innocent with monstrous potential, Harry Langdon enacted a dark, subtle humor that seems alien to the fast-paced slapstick tradition that dominated visual comedy in the silent era.

NOTES

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ABSTRACT Doing Nothing: Harry Langdon and The Performance of Absence. Where most comedians of the silent era *did* things, Harry Langdon's trick was to do nothing. His is a comedy of absence, surreal in its exploration of repressed desire that is perversely shown in his relationship with vamps. With long, slow takes he enacts a dark, subtle humor with contemporary resonance.

Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter . . . and Spring

Director/writer: Ki-Duk Kim. Producers: Seung-Jae Lee, Karl Baumgartner. Cinematography: Dong-Hyun Baek. Sony Pictures Classic.

Ki-Duk Kim has demonstrated a consistent talent, and taste, for the raw depiction of sexual perversity and cruelty, albeit in the service of often poignant evocations of the predicament of society's alienated and outcast. He is representative of a recent South Korean cinema that is explicit in what it will present on screen, and in its acknowledgment of the violence that disfigures relations between the sexes. This subject matter is often complicated by a striking visual richness that can either mitigate or compound its melancholy potential. A more troubling ambiguity is that the imagery of sexual violation can be lavishly creative and not entirely critical. An identifiable strain of misogyny and brutality in Korean films such as Kim's has been related to anxieties about male identity following the disruption of traditional structures by the country's rapid industrialization.[1]

Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter . . . and Spring (2003) appears a surprising deviation from form for Kim as the film, which charts the struggles of a Buddhist disciple to master his passions and become a monk, has an idyllic rather than realistic setting, is ethereal and philosophical in its concerns, and is, at least initially, light in tone. Yet the events that confront the disciple—frenzied lust, the multiple-stabbing murder of an unfaithful lover, the abrupt suicide by self-immolation of a spiritual mentor, and the accidental death of an anonymous mother—are no less overwhelming than those which embroil the protagonists of the director's other works. The film is, among other things, an extended demonstration of the Buddhist principle that desire brings suffering, which might also be considered the leitmotif of Kim's work to date.

Equally defining of that work is a distinctive visual style which *Spring, Summer* shares with the earlier films, relying on a close, painterly attention to color and light, and to mise-en-scène. Through the measured unfolding of film time, and in the absence of explicit characterization, communicative dialogue, or a strong narrative line, it is the fusion of meanings and mood in imagery that gives the viewer an opening into Kim's films. The visuals work expressionistically to evoke a paradoxical compassion for characters with whom we do not identify, while also metaphorically suggesting the larger social realities that sustain their straitened condition. The effect is at once explicit and elusive, offering a graphic, confrontational account of the tortured depths of the human condition which flirts with sensationalism, surrealism, and nihilism and sometimes achieves a precarious tension in which disgust and disbelief are suspended.

The form was apparent from Kim's first film, *Crocodile* (1996), which portrayed a parasitic capitalist society in macabre imagery that reduced Seoul's Han River to a conveyor of corpses scavenged by a vagrant who extorts money from the relatives of suicides. More artfully balanced is *Bad Guy* (2001), whose subtle and sometimes haunting images place the improbable, potentially offensive love between an assertive college girl and the small-time gangster who forces her into prostitution in a context of class antagonism and the marketing of the female body as a sex object.

The best example of Kim's peculiar hybrid of expressionism and realism is *The Isle* (2000), which, like most of his films, has at its core a desperate erotic relationship that captures and binds lovers almost against their will—here between a frustrated woman who provides local fishermen with supplies and sex, and an ex-policeman who has killed a former girlfriend. The leaden light, incessant drizzling rain, even a motorbike stuck in the mud, express the inner desolation of two people who become joined in a sadomasochistic bond. But *The Isle* identifies this as part of a larger human economy of the penetration of flesh whose visceral reality is insistently juxtaposed with the mute beauty of Nature, against which it appears as both grotesque deviation and logical extension.

Nature is also pervasive in *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter . . . and Spring,* which is set on an isolated lake shadowed by remote, high mountains whose dense vegetation reaches down to the shore as if to engulf, and embrace, the monastery mysteriously floating on the water. Featured in recurrent long shots that permeate the diegesis with a kind of musical harmony, this strange setting is patiently developed until it becomes an almost living presence, serenely withdrawn, complete unto itself, and far removed from the modern world. A baseline of balanced, symmetrical compositions free of tension, closed framing, and vibrant natural colors convey a sense of completeness and quietude that approaches the sublime. Gorgeous without being superfluous, the film's imagery offers us a hypnotic, but credible, vision of natural life. However, this is also a calculated effect, as *Spring, Summer* is, like most en-

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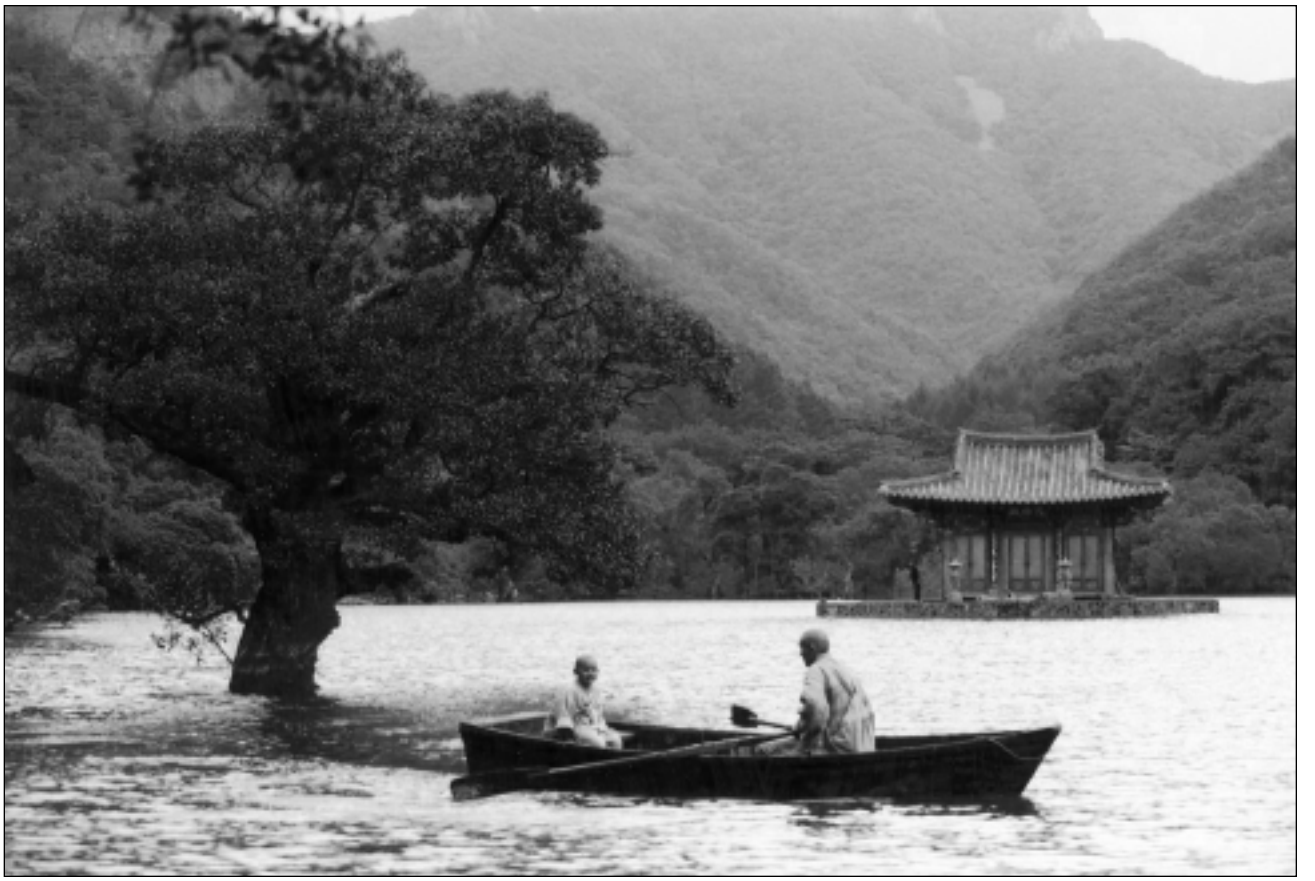


The monastery, the monk, and the disciple of *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter . . . and Spring*

chanting fables, also a morality play whose values are insinuated rather than clearly offered.

Just as the film's look beguiles, so may its ostensibly challenging Buddhist content, which proves suspiciously consonant with the caricatured Buddhism of Western popular culture. Kim appears to invite us to pretend the film is a pure representation of another culture by constructing a seductively exotic world freed of the sexual and social antagonisms that are so explicit and intractable in his prior work. The cost is that *Spring, Summer*'s conclusion appears idealistic even as it undermines the apparent resolution of the disciple's conflicted relationship to his own desire. Having "renounced" his desire, the disciple still evidences a subjectivity in which the content is symbolic and the form distinctly patriarchal in its relation to difference. Ultimately, the film is typically "Western," conforming to the Hollywood tradition of fantasy resolutions while its spirituality becomes a retreat into abstraction and contrivance that parallels the movement of Western religions before similar challenges.

BECOMING THROUGH RECURRENCE: STRUCTURING THE MONK'S JOURNEY THROUGH THE SEASONAL METAPHOR

Spring, Summer is divided into five episodes, each related to a season of the year that gives it a distinctive color palette and light. The first four episodes illustrate discrete challenges that the disciple faces as a child, teenage boy, young man, and adult, while the last presents as the culmination of his spiritual journey a return to the spring scene that opened the film. This form works to simultaneously distend and compress our sense of time as the film charts the entire trajectory of a monk's life in terms of its defining moments alone. All the action takes place in the secluded world of the monastery, which is so disconnected from the realities of present-day South Korea that the contemporary nature of the setting becomes apparent only gradually, and is never fully secure. The dislocated context and seasonal punctuation of the narrative work to confirm what the film's deliberately awkward all-inclusive title proposes, that each of its moments are now, distinct

and contingent, yet necessarily imply others in a pattern that is timeless.

The framing of events in relation to a natural cycle of change and recurrence is the opening onto a more extensive system of repetitions and interdependencies. As the seasons form a unity that preserves the particularity of each element, so actions are repeated by the same, or different, characters with slight, significant variations, which means that their sense lies in the interconnections between them. While the camera is sensitive to the endless, varied play of wind and light on water, a constant solitude and intense stillness pervade the lake, whose waters, placidly half-inundating trees and even the monastery gate, evoke a flooded lost world. Shots are framed to defer to the central, unchanging form of the monastery, but they allow the lake's surface to offer the landscape doubled, as if completed in its reflection, while a mild breeze ripples water and sky in one continuous flow, and mists and rain evanesce only to return. These harmonies might appear inanimate if it were not for the representatives of the valley's abundant animal life, which figure in each episode of the film as characters in their own right, or are featured in self-contained shots seamlessly intercut with the disciple's story.

The pattern of underlying coherence amid cyclical variation may be extended to characterization to suggest that the film does not have a fixed subject, and that what seem to be relations between characters depict a process of becoming through which some essential monk identity that inhabits the monastery appears in various life-phases and contexts, finding expression through a timeless recurrence of boy-youth-adult-old man becoming monk. That none of the characters (apart from the disciple, they are an old monk who is his master and two visitors to the monastery: a sick girl and a young mother) have personal names facilitates seeing them in this way, as does the master's profound passivity and sudden, highly symbolic departure from the film mid-way through it. One could almost ask if the master (or the disciple) is "real," and perhaps interpret the film's rhythmical recurrences and occasional conflations of perspective as the marks of reverie, but this is to make a kind of category mistake, considering questions of existence when what is at issue for the film is the realization of essence. Self implies other, and one life seems to recall and complete itself in another to suggest that what we see are not the passing phases of a single life but the continuous seasons of life itself.

Where this quite captivating scheme falters is on a vexed issue, that of the relation of becoming to Being, the time-bound to the timeless, the particular to the universal. Apart from the problem of actualizing the transition from a contingent to an essential state, there is also a potential outright contradiction if a process of becoming cannot conclude in a determinate state of Being. In the case of the disciple's journey, its end is not a universal "enlightenment"; it remains charged with precisely those psychosexual values that have proven most compulsive and damaging for him throughout the film. A further difficulty is the tendency to retrospectively reify any particular course of becoming conceived as issuing in Being as "the" path, abstracting out its particularity and contingency. It is for this reason that the film is least convincing at just those points where it comes closest to lived reality, as in its treatment of sexual desire. *Spring, Summer* shares with Kim's other films an impassive acceptance of the near-impossibility of a sustained sexual relationship between equals, but stands apart in overlooking the other horn of the human dilemma, the near-inescapability of attempting and reattempting such relationships for a species that is both highly social and highly sexed.

Another way to characterize these problems is in terms of a failure to include difference within the state of Being that appears as the culmination of becoming. In *Spring, Summer,* this is a consequence of the narrowness of the film's small ensemble of characters—its central, and perhaps only, identity is male, while its few women are undeveloped and quickly dispatched—and it drives the film's increasing resort to symbolic artifice as the difference excluded from the narrative reappears on a symbolic level. Natural forms such as the seasonal rhythm and the monastery setting come to stand in for social ones, while recurrences in events and identities displace unresolved tensions between and within characters as the film moves from the particular to the abstract.

It is possible to trace the disciple's journey not as the path to Being that the film implies it is, but in terms of his relations to difference. Each season proves to involve a certain type of relation, which might be termed in succession infantile, sexual, sublimated, repressed, and abstract. Before considering these, there is the question of how the film characterizes Being.

SETTING: BELONGING TO PLACE AS THE TIMELESS FORM OF BEING

The answer is implicit in how the disciple twice leaves the monastery only to return after suffering in the external world, and how the arrival of outsiders appears to disrupt, and their departure restore, the peace of the

monastery. One way of conceiving the disciple's struggle is to accept that he belongs to the monastery, that his life is, and must be, one with it. In effect, the film characterizes Being in terms of the monastery itself, so that becoming is the progressive union of character with setting.

A few images of this setting have no identifiable function as establishing shots, expressions of mood, or representations of some theme. Whether they offer an already familiar postcard scenery from a series of unexpected angles or only a static image of the line of vegetation sitting on the shore under a grey sky, they make us aware of time not as passing or empty, but as living time, made visible and evenly articulated in the regular sounds of running water and a bell tinkling in the breeze. They convey a sense of undefined presence, at whose heart is the monastery. At times, the camera moves so that the monastery seems to rotate and even accelerate across the water, though it remains in place without visible anchor or foundation, as if change were only a fleeting, dream-like effect of perspective that cannot touch a settled, causeless equilibrium. Yet this is not a static condition: shots looking to the far shore from inside or moving around the monastery use its almost subliminal floating motion so that the landscape sometimes seems to slowly circle the monastery, subtly destabilizing our determinations of what is fixed and active, what central and peripheral in this world.

These moments of subjectless presence stand apart; a strangely appropriate, self-sustaining dysfunctionality is the most accessible, and insinuating, property of the monastery for the film's audience and characters. It comes as no surprise when we learn that cell phones do not work in the valley and see two jaded policemen who come to the monastery briefly caught up in its rhythms despite themselves. In fact, we take pleasure in this, for the monastery feels somehow "right" as it is, not despite but because of its archaic forms and rituals that effortlessly vitiate the extended grasp of modernity. Neither functional nor organized, it just is, and is itself. This is one way to characterize the essential.

The pattern extends to the monastery's inner space, which is actually an artificial set built on location in one of South Korea's national parks that effects a union of interior and exterior, illustrating another of the film's spiritual principles. Though the disciple and the master sleep in a room that is not walled off from the altar area, they still move between the two spaces through a door which, like the gate to the monastery itself, stands alone and is not part of any wall. The formalities of the "door" are observed with a comical punctiliousness which also suggest it is a means of organizing social relations to signal consideration for others. The one exception is when the disciple goes to sleep with a girl lying waiting for him before the altar; he is unable to open the door and must instead creep stealthily across the absent "wall." The arrangement of the monastery's internal space does not so much present a choice as subsume zones of restraint and transgression in recognition of the inevitable waywardness of desire. It provides a minimal stage on which relations between its occupants of difference and change are given form and representation within it—but ultimately only that.

SPRING: THE INFANTILE FORM OF RELATION TO DIFFERENCE

The drama of "Spring" provides a template for the recurrences of events and imagery that structure the film, with the coordination of season and mood apparent from the first. The disciple appears as a wayward young boy whom the master patiently follows around, while the valley feels somehow cosier in this episode—a cradling, almost womb-like haven—as an effect of the shaded light, subdued emerald water, humid air, and relative absence of long shots. But this image of secure childhood quickly proves illusory.

As the master observes him without interfering, we watch the boy tie a stone to first a fish, then a frog and a snake, seeming under an idiot compulsion driven by idleness or sheer contrariness. This is how the film will present all actions that cause suffering, not so much willfully wrong as misguided, enactments of a deficient understanding of any life different to one's own.

The disciple has a dog in this episode, whose puppy cuteness symbolizes his own, but the love lavished on it also contrasts with those creatures which the disciple does not identify with, treating them instead as objects for a playful curiosity that is as much canine as infantile when it extends to cruel, arbitrary assault. That the disciple ties down the fish, frog, and snake might suggest he is acting out and visiting on them the frustration he feels at being confined to the monastery. The master does not order the boy to release them, nor does he warn of what will happen to them. Instead, he ties a large stone to the boy as he sleeps so that he wakes knowing the creatures' suffering not by empathizing with them, but by finding it embodied in himself. The master does not directly acknowledge the disciple's admission, "It was wrong to do it," simply telling him to release each one or "You will carry the stone in your heart all your life." He is not concerned with having the

The mysterious object of desire …

boy learn to apply some system of moral judgment to his actions, which would have him remain focused on himself, but with his recognizing his immanent relation to others and its potential to cause suffering.

The master looks on as if he might be ruefully remembering the follies and pain of a younger self as the boy struggles up the hill. He finds that the fish and snake have died, and only the frog has survived. While clearly moved, it is uncertain what he has learned. That the master did not intervene is the first sign of his paradoxically commanding passivity, a tendency not to act, and to influence the life around him all the more for it. In this he resembles the monastery, which endures and absorbs the shocks of the external world, an analogy that could suggest he has achieved oneness with the monastery and shares in its vital power. The master's place in the film is a challenge to the assumption implicit in the boy's actions and shared by most viewers, that our relationship to the world is active and instrumental, treating it, and others, as material existing apart from us upon which we act to realize ourselves.

SUMMER: THE SEXUAL RELATION TO DIFFERENCE—THE OTHER AS OBJECT OF DESIRE

"Summer" begins with the arrival of a troubled, mysteriously ill girl who shatters the monks' peaceful isolation. The film presents her as an object of desire, but also as standing apart from the monastery, other to the now-adolescent disciple's world. She is first seen as if emerging out of a vast nebulous mist that shrouds the mountains and the world beyond them. Dressed in its white, she contrasts with the valley's prevailing grey-green-blue harmonies (with which the monks' clothes blend), not so much pure as blank, unknown—and implicitly disruptive.

What follows is more mating dance than flirtation or courtship, and is played as farce, though the emotion

involved is raw and genuine. The creature to symbolize this fraught drama of spring is a chicken, whose reflexive pecking signifies desire as mindless obsession-compulsion. Frequent cuts to its pecking punctuate the comedy; one follows a scene in which the disciple tenderly adjusts a blanket over the girl as she sleeps, only to impulsively seize hold of her breast, receive a solid slap across the face in return, then launch into frantic devotions which thereby become part of the cycle of lust. This cycle eventually appears as a tightly constricting circle in which the disciple is caught. We see him alone in the boat, rowing with only one oar in the water so that he compulsively spins round and round. He is nailed to the spot, just as he is by his frustrated desire, which finds expression here in a parody of masturbation.

His turbulence is one with the season, whose warmth and light are omnipresent but inconsistent, the promise of luminous dawn mists lying weightless on the lake as often giving way to languorous rainy days as to seamless blue skies and the throb of insect noise. In the limpid nights, the monastery illuminated from within appears to ripple and flow, blue-hued under its reflection cast and accepted back from the lake, as if fused with a liquid, insubstantial vision of itself.

First love disintegrates like the chimera of a summer night, but the frenzy of sexual possession does not end when the master sends the girl away with the laconic observation that as she is now well, "sex was the right medicine." The disciple leaves the monastery and pursues her into the world; the chicken is set loose amid the vegetation beyond the monastery.

FALL: SUBLIMATING THE SEXUAL RELATION TO THE OTHER

The disciple is an adult when he returns. The monastery now appears solid and prosaic, as if it had condensed with the cooling air and increasingly metallic light reflected off the lake. But it is the burnished tone of the leaves and insistent mists which express the disciple's angry, clouded mood in "Fall." We learn that he killed the girl after she was unfaithful to him, but we do not see the killing, nor anything else of his time in the external world. While satisfactory in narrative terms, this omission—which is unexpected, given Kim's track record in presenting such events—implies that the disciple's actual experiences are irrelevant.

At first, the disciple cannot master the emotion his act has unleashed in him; it erupts in convulsive facial tics and twitches, and frantic stabbing at the wooden decking of the monastery. The one thing that restores him to some semblance of lucidity is a discipline the master assigns to him—to carve the long, complex figures of the Prajnaparamita sutra into the decking.

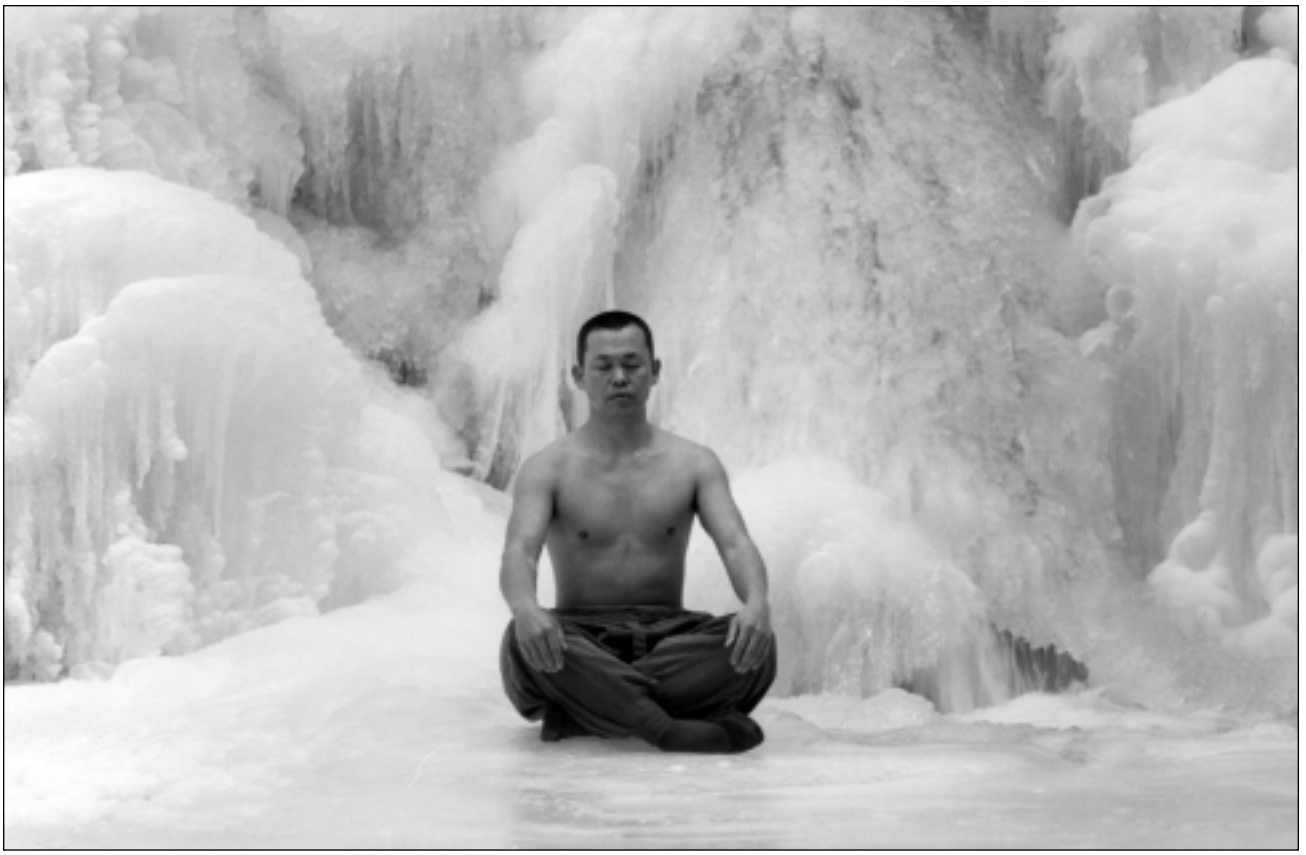
The symbolic animal for "Fall" is a cat, and the characters of the sutra are first painted by the master using its tail for a brush; then the disciple follows with his knife. The master studiously ignores the cat's continuous howling plaint, but the animal is included in this scene not just for humor; its swishing tail evokes the incessant irritated agitation of desire. The master's use of the cat to write is a figure for his putting the disciple's passion to work, the energy expended through the uncoordinated knife stabbing now, in almost the same gesture, acquiring purpose and sense, producing a text. The disciple's violent bodily agitation (the form of desire once its object is lost, or in this case, consumed) is ordered as signification wedded to functional action. The process resembles Freudian sublimation, and the film demonstrates a similar tendency to valorize the "productive" use of a drive while ignoring that the principle of sublimation is necessarily normative.

The rowboat again carries the disciple away, this time to prison, and again bears the season's symbolic animal, the cat.

WINTER: RECURRENCE AS THE TRAUMATIC RETURN OF THE REPRESSED

The disciple returns in a wintry landscape to find the master gone and the monastery lying silent, frozen and eerily twilit under a low cobalt sky. We have seen the master die, the colors of "Fall" also symbolizing his autumn—with dispassionate consistency—as its flaming red-brown hints were realized in his self-immolation on the lake. The disciple is surprisingly unaffected, and it is instead a subsequent event, the drowning of an unknown mother, which prompts a highly emotional response that, though equally impersonal, brings about a profound change in him. If the lesson of "Spring" was sublimation, another Freudian mechanism, the return of the repressed, can explain the events of "Winter."

But there is another logic to the master's exiting the film at this point, one that may explain the disciple's equanimity: it is as if the master should no longer be present because the disciple has become the monastery's single monk. If the apparent external relation of two characters, master and disciple, is considered as a division internal to a monk essence striving to master itself, we would expect this essence to have only one expression once it no longer acts as if it is divided by its passions. That the identities of master and disciple are mutually sustaining and almost interchangeable is consistent with how the symbolism of the master's self-immolation identifies him with the disciple burning in



The winter freeze takes hold.

his own desire. Even the way the master rows out into the lake to die relates to the disciple, echoing similar shots of him rowing first as a boy, then as a youth wooing the girl. The master sets fire to himself and sinks into the water just as the disciple sank into the depths of abjection and criminality through his desire. Finally, however, the burning of the master may evoke the burning out of the disciple's desire and his ultimate return to the path of the monk.

The master remains for the disciple as a memory, with his death a means for the disciple to recover from his crime and so recover the master by becoming the monk the master worked for him to be. But we see this symbolized in a rite rather than enacted in the life of the disciple, who almost by default assumes the place of the master and now becomes the monastery's resident monk. He cuts through the iced-over lake to retrieve the master's remains, from which he extracts the teeth. These are then wrapped in a red cloth placed in the head of a Buddha carved out of ice under the waterfall where the monk made love as a disciple in "Summer." It gradually loses its distinctness—its appearance of individuality—as the winter freeze takes hold. When the waterfall flows again after the thaw, the red cloth reemerges to continue on its course. The relation between the winter ice, in which the memory of the dead might be preserved, and the spring water, through whose renewed flow life continues, is one of a change in appearance rather than substance, as is perhaps the relation of life and death embodied in the connection between the living monk and the dead.

As in "Summer," the winter season mellows in harmony with the disciple's seemingly completed development into a monk. With his desire and its distortions of feeling and perception exhausted, the air is cool and crisp, and the monastery, bathed in a brittle sunlight, is freed of its captivating reflections from the lake. The monk's reinhabitation of the monastery is soon disrupted, again by a woman. Her face is covered by a scarf and she carries a baby that we presume she intends to leave at the monastery. She is, like the girl in "Spring," another mysterious, needy object of compulsive fascination for the monk, who goes to remove the scarf and expose her face while she sleeps. She quickly departs in the middle of the night, but falls through a weak spot in the iced-over lake where the monk had cut

a hole and drowns. That this follows on his attempt to expose her throws his apparent maturity into doubt, because it is of a pattern with his previous acts. As a boy and adolescent, he sought to realize his own desire through impulse actions which operated on others as an invasion and interrogation, and the attempt to know through the other has again resulted in the other's death.

The dramatic effect of the mother's death on the monk may be considered a displacement of the affect we would have expected from the loss of his master. Driving the displacement is a repression, one that allows the disciple's actions following his master's death to symbolize memory as mediating the rupture that is death so as to preserve the appearance of unbroken recurrences of monk identity. The repressed content that returns as the mother's corpse is fished out of the lake is the brute reality of death itself, its cold materiality that threatens to overwhelm any idea of life as essential. Separated from this reality, the master appeared transformed into signs that remembered him (his remains) and were given symbolic life through their insertion into the metaphor of the freeze and thaw.

Another aspect of the displacement is that a female body becomes the object which allows for the "clean" symbolization of a continuing identity that is male. The mother may serve as such an object because she embodies the question of the monk's origin. Did he come to the monastery in a similar way, orphaned or left by his own mother, her motives and identity as unknown to him as this masked mother's? To the extent that his origin involves lack or absence, it contaminates the idealized image of the master-disciple relation with possibilities of need, and hence power and inequality. And if it raises the question of how new disciples come to the monastery, it undermines the appearance of the master-disciple relation as timeless and self-regenerating. In sum, what is repressed from the form of identity represented in the ice metaphor and returns as the mother is difference as an unstable dynamic of relations to others, which change in time and end in death.

The film works to contain the meaning of the mother's death, locating it solely in relation to the events of "Spring" through inserted flashbacks to the fish, frog, and snake as the monk repeats her trek across the frozen lake. In exposing himself to the same danger which became the mother's fate, of falling through the ice and dying, the monk attempts to take onto himself the consequences of this repetition of his past actions. He attaches a large stone to his back, signifying acceptance of the master's truth that the stone still lies on his heart, but also that this is the lesson to be learned here. Identifying himself with, and as, the victims of his own curiosity, the monk can know what it is to be the other to his actions as a self, and thus recognize the form of repetition that the film presents as defining this self.

The monk's trek with the stone takes him into the mountains that have figured as an insistent, tantalizing presence on the edges of the frame throughout the film. He finally places a figurine that he carried with him on a peak so it can look down on the monastery far below. The breathtaking panorama opened up by his perspective from the peak appears liberating and transcendent, suggesting that it symbolizes the attainment of some all-encompassing understanding, which the camera seeks to confirm as definitive by freezing on the image of the now-distant monastery. The film's lengthy, emotive depiction of the monk's perilous ascent identifies the position he attains as continuous with the temptation and pitfall-ridden path of his life. Even so, the powerful reality of the mountains securing and defining the monk's world and the visual mastery they ultimately confer on him work to vitiate the film's earlier moments of undefined presence amid perceptual flux as no more than stages on a path to spirituality. It is, however, one whose triumphant conclusion is more conventionally Western than Eastern.

The monk's alignment with the figurine implies it is a new identification with the feminine, which has figured as other to the monk, that opens up the larger understanding represented by the peak. He has, until now, identified with his father (the more so as this father was absent), acting out through his mischievous boyhood and wayward youth toward an authority figure he would have had dominate him—a role the master refused to play. Yet the monk's taking possession of the female statue suggests that, rather than his achieving some "ideal" state of being without desire, desire has only passed into a symbolic register, where it appears "satisfied" by possession of the sign of its object. If the figurine completes the symbolic structure of the monk's understanding, it also becomes a sign of that structure's basic contradiction: to appear all-inclusive, it must signify what it cannot include within it, the content which becomes fundamental because it cannot be embraced. Initially, this is women, but finally it is what they are associated with in the monk's experience: sex and death.

AND SPRING: RECURRENCE AS THE ABSTRACT FORM OF RELATION TO DIFFERENCE

Unexpectedly, the film does not end on this climactic note. Another "Spring" opens, and gives us an image of the monk's new life. He has taken on a boy, who we

assume was the one brought by the masked mother, as his own disciple. The film's last episode presents the utopian fantasies at once permitted and necessitated by the exclusion of women from the life of the monastery: the fantasies of infantile regression in denial of time and change, of a return to the sexless idyll of childhood, and of the reproduction of an unchanging male identity without sustained relation to a female presence.

The transferal of desire to the symbolic forces us to view the film's dense network of symbolism as an additional order of meaning overlaid onto its events, relegating them to some other, implicitly subordinate reality. Actual existing difference is divorced from, and exchanged for, the abstract form of difference, represented as variation within a series whose identity lies in its unvarying repetition. So the film concludes as it began, with a master-disciple bond restored to its original state following vicissitudes that are attributed to the transient presence of female outsiders. The surviving monk identity does not partake in some undifferentiated state of Being because its essence is organized in terms of a master and disciple, cycling through alternate phases of struggling for mastery and acceptance of itself. Even as the film ends, it insists this cycle does not: we see the boy rowing toward the open gate of the monastery, then cut to the figurine looking down from the peak, aligned so that all it represents appears directly in his path.

Kim's latest film, *3-Iron* (2005), plays out the themes of *Spring, Summer* in a contemporary context. Its central character, a solitary young male, breaks into a series of houses while its owners are absent, occupies them—doing odd repairs, watering the plants, putting away the laundry—then moves on. His simple, unmotivated care for the homes realizes the same kind of fusion of character with place that we see in the early scenes of *Spring, Summer,* though his matter-of-fact alienation and the urban setting give this a nomadic, transient nature. There is a similarly rootless relationship to a woman—dispassionate, inarticulate, more or less asexual, yet strangely enduring. Inevitably, though, the realities of possession intrude in the shape of laws and property rights, contravened and asserted with violence and corruption. Again, the protagonist ends up in prison, and his release opens the way to an artificial resolution. In this case, he turns himself into a ghost or spirit and is free to revisit the houses he inhabited in peace.

3-Iron concludes with an epigraph observing that in this world, it is often difficult to tell dream from reality. Kim's films actually resolve this difficulty by materializing a dream-like world colored in the harsh, rich tones of reality. Where they have yet to succeed is in reconciling the unsettling complications of being in the world with our desire to participate in more abiding harmonies, a failing which is of course not theirs alone, and one way of defining the human condition.

NOTE

1. See, for instance, Kyung Hyun Kim, *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004).

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ABSTRACT *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter . . . and Spring* charts the struggles of a Buddhist disciple with passions that appear to be mastered only through the film's symbolic artifice. Recurrences in events and identities displace unresolved sexual tensions between and within characters, while vicissitudes of suffering and death are attributed to female outsiders whose transient presence cannot disrupt the natural harmonies of the idyllic monastery setting and the narrative's seasonal rhythm.

Lost in Translation

Director/writer: Sofia Coppola. Producers: Ross Katz, Coppola. Cinematographer: Lance Acord. Focus Features/Universal.

Bill Murray and Scarlett Johansson—two lonely Americans in *Lost in Translation*

Sofia Coppola's *Lost in Translation* (2003) is littered with familiar signifiers for an unfamiliar Japan: streets ablaze with neon pictographs, bowing concierges bustling after guests in a high-tech hotel, pop-star hipsters with multicolored hair sporting synthetic fashions. Marketed as a comedy, the film prompts snickers of amusement from its Western audience. But its humor did not translate well with Japanese audiences: the film's Japanese distributor, Tohokushinsha Co., opted for a delayed opening at a single Tokyo movie theater, with a website trailer as its sole advertisement. Local critics were not laughing either: Yoshio Tsuchiya called the film "stereotypical and discriminatory"; the writer Kotaro Sawaki noted that the Japanese characters "are consistently portrayed as foolish."[1] Indeed, the film's Orientalism is marked enough to have prompted the Los Angles-based non-profit organization Asian Media Watch to launch a campaign against its four Academy Award nominations. Despite such protests, the film garnered the award for best original screenplay, and the majority of American critics have continued to rave about its nuanced representation of cultural alienation.

With *Lost in Translation,* Coppola wavers between insight into the comedy of cultural difference and clichéd cultural stereotyping. On occasion, the balance tips in her favor. *Lost in Translation* does not claim to represent Tokyo authentically, objectively, or thoroughly; rather, every image has the fresh quality and provisional status of a first impression. But nor does the film sufficiently clarify that its real subject is not Tokyo itself, but Western perceptions of Tokyo—in particular, the fantasies that two lonely Americans project onto the city and its residents. When Japan appears superficial, inappropriately erotic, or unintelligible, we are never completely sure whether this vision belongs to Coppola, to her characters, or simply to a Hollywood cinematic imaginary that has been offering up such images of the East at least since Cecil B. DeMille's 1915 *The Cheat,* as described by scholar Gina Marchetti.[2] We remain unsure whose pair of murky glasses we are wearing, lost without reference points in a Pacific-wide ocean of fantasies.

Film Quarterly, Vol. 59, Issue 1, pages 45-48. ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2005 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, at www.ucpress.edu/journals/rights.htm.

It was of course the late Edward Said who wrote the book on Orientalism. While his study concerns Western Europe's relation to the Arab world, rather than the United States' relation to East Asia, Said's text is still an illuminating one in this context. "Everyone who writes about the Orient," Said cautions, "must locate himself vis-à-vis the Orient." This location, Said continues, is not spatial, but rather discursive, subjective, and perceptual. It includes "the kind of narrative voice" the author adopts, "the type of structure" the text assumes, and "the kinds of images, themes, and motifs" that circulate within it, all of which, according to Said, ultimately conspire to "contain" the Orient: to "represent or speak on its behalf."[3] In a way, we could say that a film like *Lost in Translation* breaks from the tradition of Orientalism that Said is describing because its author never clearly locates herself in relation to the city and people she films. We feel like aloof tourists at one turn and intimate locals at the next. Coppola's camera adopts an ambiguous attitude, combining dazzled humility with bemused condescension. At no point, it is true, do we securely occupy the confident position of the superior Western gaze upon the non-Western. But the film ends up containing the Orient and "speaking on its behalf" in another way: by representing it as a space where an American may get lost, but without being significantly changed or unmoored by the experience. As Scarlett Johansson's character puts it, she "doesn't feel anything" when she encounters her cultural others.

Our guides on the journey are Bob Harris (Bill Murray), a fading, B-level Hollywood actor who travels to Tokyo to shoot a Suntory whiskey advertisement, and Charlotte (Johansson), a recent Yale graduate, already bored in her marriage, who has accompanied her music-producer husband on a trip to film a video. Both characters have lost their bearings, the compasses of their desire momentarily set adrift by the very images through which they had previously defined themselves. Charlotte and Bob meet by chance in the New York Bar of the Park Hyatt Hotel, where lounge singers croon tepid versions of American pop songs as tourists sip their American cocktails. Charlotte recognizes Bob from his movies. Along with the setting, this dose of the familiar provides an antidote to their homesickness and insomnia that will spark an eroticized yet sublimated friendship.

When Bob shows up for his photo shoot, he is confronted with the images that Japanese culture has projected onto him as a representative of Hollywood masculinity. The photographer commands him to assume various iconic poses—a James Bond wink, a Dean Martin swagger—as he reluctantly tips his glass for the camera. The scene is acted and shot for humor at the expense of the Japanese perception of what a desirable American male looks like: how he sits and gestures, what kind of suit he wears, what kind of whiskey he drinks. The more Bob gives the photographer what he wants, the more he is emasculated, both because he is following the orders of a man who cannot correctly pronounce "Rat Pack," and because the images he recreates seem antiquated and fey by contemporary American standards. But this emasculation does not stick to Bob. It is returned to sender: attributed to Japanese naïveté rather than to its American source.

Many scenes in *Lost in Translation* would seem to present opportunities for the mirror to be held up in the other direction. But because point of view is limited to Bob and Charlotte, we see more of their incomprehension than that of their hosts. The camera emphasizes Bob's bewildered reaction to the bowing greeters at the hotel, his face an amalgam of jet lag and sarcasm. When a call girl arrives at his hotel room, the camera seems to share his vaguely repulsed indifference. The film prompts us to read this incident, as well as his quick exit from an after-hours strip club, as a comment on Japanese sexuality and gender roles rather than on American prudishness. The film focalizes these images through Bob: it is the greeter, not he, who looks ridiculous; it is the dancer who is overly salacious, not he who projects this image onto her. Other scenes in the film—Bob's appearance on a Japanese television show, for instance—share in this attitude.

There are a few scenes where we get an inkling that the incomprehension is mutual, a flicker of understanding that the West might also be an exotic enigma for the East. In a scene at a hospital waiting room, for instance, a stranger asks Bob in Japanese how many years he has been in Japan. Failing to understand, Bob can only mimic a few syllables; his interlocutor bursts into laughter. The tables are turned: West now imitates East. But on the whole, *Lost in Translation* makes but minimal efforts to rewrite the myths of Asia that Hollywood film has been recycling for nearly a century: the Orient as primitive, feminized, and eroticized; Asian citizens as alternately silly or perilous, enigmatic and cloaked in artifice. Such myths can be traced to historical factors such as the Opium Wars, nineteenth-century immigration patterns from China, the traumas of World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. But they also fulfill a psychical need, a projection whereby Hollywood's Tokyos and Chinatowns become a kind of cinematic dumping ground for anything that defies Western comprehension.[4]

Set adrift on the streets of Tokyo …

How, then, does one make a film about one people's projections onto another, one culture's fantasies about another, without reproducing those very projections? How does one represent what is lost in translation from both sides? The task may ultimately be impossible: to strip away those projections entirely would require a vision unencumbered—and unenhanced—by the human psyche. But Coppola's earlier film, *The Virgin Suicides,* handles an analogous transaction more deftly. In *The Virgin Suicides,* a group of adolescent boys fantasize about the five beautiful sisters who live across the street as, one by one, these sisters take their own lives. Wanting to communicate, but not knowing how to crack through the walls of the girls' enchanted castle, the boys can only watch and send coded messages by phonograph. The sisters remain a mystery; their actions are never fully explained. But if they are reduced to Ophelia-like ciphers of tragic girlhood, it is because this film is not really about them: it is about the boys' fascination with them. *The Virgin Suicides* is about the boys' struggle to sift through the thickly layered images of 1970s idealized femininity—Brady Bunch sisters, Barbie dolls, Karen Carpenter, echoes of the von Trapp family—and find the human beings underneath. This story is equally important to tell, because, as the film makes clear, the girls' own subjectivities are not distinct from but shaped by these very images.

Lost in Translation might have benefited from a similar treatment—from a clarification that its Japan is but an amalgam of signs and images. It might also have benefited from the influence of earlier films that address the theme of Western perceptions of the East. Chris Marker's *Sans soleil* (1983), Leslie Thornton's *Adynata* (1983), and Wim Wenders' *Tokyo-Ga* (1985) and *Notebook on Cities and Clothes* (1989) come to mind. Of particular relevance is *Tokyo-Ga,* which documents the filmmaker's trip to Japan in the spring of 1983. Initially, Wenders goes to research Yasujiro Ozu, but he soon becomes entranced by the landscape as a whole: he films Pachinko parlors, indoor golf ranges, and a factory where artificial plastic foods are produced. Part essay, part travelogue, *Tokyo-Ga* is narrated from multiple "locations," in Said's sense. Wenders speaks to us in voiceover as pilgrim, film historian, and poet-philosopher. At one turn he applies the researcher's detached gaze to Japanese athletics; at another he reveals the depths of his love for Yuuharu Atsuta's cinematography. But at each point, Wenders specifies the context of his perceptions and marks his relationship to them. Like Roland Barthes' *Empire of Signs,* a book of meditative fragments inspired by a similar trip, *Tokyo-Ga* makes clear that it "in no way attempts to represent reality itself." Rather, it could be said, in Barthes' words, to "descend into the untranslatable . . . without attempting to muffle its shock."[5]

An example of this occurs when Wenders shows two sets of images of the Shinjuko neighborhood in Tokyo, filmed first with his own lens, and then a second time with the 50-millimeter lens preferred by Ozu. "Another image presented itself," he tells us, "one that no longer belonged to me." Soon after, Wenders happens upon a group of Japanese teenagers in 1950s styles of dress, earnestly lindy-hopping as the music of Elvis Presley sounds from a boom box in a public park. At no time, however, does Wenders' camera smirk at them. Rather, it seems to marvel at the inextricable mixture of

East and West, and at the emergence of the past into the present in such an unexpected and vital form. Unlike the photographers and karaoke singers in *Lost in Translation,* these dancers are not foreign copycats mimicking and pirating a superior American ideal. Rather, their rockabilly masks are donned with all the self-consciousness of Kabuki actors. They do not transcribe 1950s America; they translate it.

Lost in Translation, on the other hand, emphasizes what is mimicked without understanding, what escapes translation. Sensations of incomprehension, of loss of control, of forgetting even the time of day, tend to dominate. These sensations, the film makes clear, can be highly pleasurable, and even transformative when one is open to them. Coppola's images of Tokyo streets viewed through the windows of taxis reveal a carnival of sirenlike signs, ablaze and saturating the skyline. During an extended nightlife sequence, Bob and Charlotte rent a karaoke room in a high-rise building; its façade appears as if sectioned into hundreds of television screens. This image calls attention to its representational status, its status as sign rather than reality. Cityscapes that appear to defy the laws of Western perspective, curving off-ramps that seem to defy gravity—these are rendered all the more exhilarating because Bob and Charlotte cannot read them, and thus may appreciate them for their visual properties. Such images revel in the feeling of lostness without attempting to muffle its shock with cheap humor.

One scene in *Lost in Translation* appears to quote another of Wenders' films, *Paris, Texas.* This is a kindred film in that it represents a European perception of a foreign place, the American West. In one scene, the eight-year-old Hunter sits in the window of a Houston, Texas, hotel listening to a tape recording that his father has left for him: a goodbye letter. Hunter's body outlined against the views of an alien city, the disembodied voice of his father both bridging and highlighting the sense of disconnection—these qualities are also apparent in an image of Coppola's, in which Charlotte sits in her Tokyo hotel-room window talking on the telephone to a relative back home. The reference is subtle enough that the quotation cannot be vouchsafed; I cannot really tell whether I am projecting it onto Coppola's film. But perhaps this is what *Lost in Translation* can teach us: that an authentic essence can never be fully distinguished from the barrage of signifiers that are slathered onto it. The trick, then, is to chart that risky territory with care, and with openness to new ways of seeing.

NOTES

1. Yoshio Tsuchiya, trans. Fumie Nakamura, film review in *Yomiuri Shimbun* (April 19, 2004); Kotaro Sawaki, film review in *Asahi Shimbun,* quoted in V. A. Musetto, "'Lost' in Transition," *New York Post* (May 21, 2004).
2. See Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the "Yellow Peril": Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).
3. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 20.
4. For more detailed studies of the psychical mechanisms that underlie this type of racialized subjectivity, see Anne Cheng's *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) and David Eng's *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001).
5. Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs,* trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 3.

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ABSTRACT *Lost in Translation* was big in the States, but less so in Japan, where its racism deterred critics. While clearly trafficking in stereotypes, the film does depart from Hollywood's tradition of Orientalism by indicating that its Tokyo is actually a fantasy version projected by Americans abroad. Still, the film lacks the complexity of its European predecessors.

ANNUAL FILM BOOK SURVEY

PART II

Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film

By Jigna Desai. New York: Routledge, 2004. $90.95 cloth; $25.95 paper. 288 pages.

For decades, Satyajit Ray was the only South Asian filmmaker known in the West (and thus in the growing discipline of film studies). If the massive output of popular Indian cinema was noted, it was summarily dismissed. More recently, scholars in India and throughout the South Asian diaspora have at last recognized the world's largest cinema as a proper critical concern, even if the most visible of India's various cinemas —popular Hindi film—is still trivialized as "Bollywood." Ironically, this energetic critical focus on popular cinema has momentarily (one hopes) displaced the sparse attention to Indian art (or "parallel" or "middle") cinema when a few works by additional Indian directors surfaced at film festivals in the 1960s and 1970s.

Until recently, in other words, there was no reason to go "beyond Bollywood," since the popular cinema of Bombay (now officially Mumbai) hadn't yet appeared on the critical map. How does one go beyond what hasn't yet arrived? Jigna Desai's sophisticated study is not, however, a retrieval of the now neglected work of "serious" Indian filmmakers like Ray, his fellow Bengalis Mrinal Sen and Ritwik Ghatak, or the Keralan master Adoor Gopalakrishnan (celebrated in France and still virtually unknown in North America). Instead, her study treats the cinema of the South Asian diaspora, which occupies a literal as well as symbolic space between what Indians (after Nobel prizewinner Rabindranath Tagore's novel, adapted by Ray) might call "home" and "the world." As Desai argues, these films, like their creators and typical characters, resist being located. Are they "foreign" despite North American funding? Does an "Indian" director living in Canada make national or international films? Is *Monsoon Wedding* a Bollywood film? Is it even an Indian film? As Desai emphasizes, the questions of identity central to diasporic lives and narratives also challenge our understanding and reception of a growing body of increasingly popular films.

Although many of the films treated in *Beyond Bollywood* have received significant critical attention, Desai's book is, as she justly claims, the first sustained attempt to demonstrate the shared affiliations and concerns of these works, and as such the book is genuinely groundbreaking. Arguing that diasporic films reach a much larger audience than the nevertheless more fully treated South Asian novel in English of the past few decades, Desai declares "an investment in mobilizing an analysis of cinema to ask questions regarding significant cultural, political, social, and economic processes in globalization" (ix). With such ambitious goals, she notes that "this book is about film, but not only film" (1) I'm willing to affirm that Desai makes good on her larger goals, but a focused cinematic or textual analysis of these films remains to be written.

Simply put, Desai's sophisticated readings of key films persistently rely upon content analysis, tacitly affirming the realist form of most of these works except in the moments when they imitate, usually as parody, the emphatically nonrealist style of popular Hindi cinema. In a few cases, Desai's attempts at formal analysis are misleading, as when she refers to "scenes of establishing shots" (104) for a narrative sequence that would be conventionally described as a single crosscut scene. Other, more careful descriptions aren't always made with clear interpretive purpose, while the functions of sound and music in these films receive rare attention. Although Desai "positions South Asian diasporic cinema as an interstitial cinema located between Hollywood and Bollywood" (ix), more precise formal analysis would, I think, affiliate most of her examples with the international art cinema, at least in its now dominant liberal and realist rather than radical or avant-garde mode.

Most of her examples are not really caught, as she places them, between the world's two largest popular cinemas, but are works that self-consciously offer the bourgeois pleasures

of character study, understated performance, and a clear social message (elements that hardly describe the contemporary Hollywood blockbuster). Although the economic and industrial meaning of the term has been eclipsed, most diasporic films retain the formal and thematic features of "independent" cinema rather than the attractions of either American or Indian mainstream models. (At the same time, the easy characterization of Bollywood as a mere imitator of Hollywood demands revision in light of more recent examples such as the South Indian auteur Mani Ratnam's Hindi film *Yuva,* clearly modeled upon the international art theatre hit *Amores Perros,* with hints of Kieslowski thrown in for good measure.) In her solid introductory overview of the political economy and recent history of diasporic film, Desai raises the more subtle distinctions between Hollywood and Bollywood as well as national cinemas and the art film, but her dominant concern with placing diasporic films in their complex political and economic contexts displaces the (significantly different, I think) affiliations that could be signaled by their formal and stylistic patterns.

If, however, her analyses rarely emphasize the formal features of diasporic cinema (in marked contrast, for instance, to Hamid Naficy's work, cited here), Desai's investigations are still illuminating, especially in terms of the perhaps surprising but crucial role that gender and sexuality play in films that might be assumed to emphasize ethnic, racial, or national differences. Maintaining a feminist and queer perspective throughout, Desai offers subtle treatments of the persistent concerns of diasporic texts, including the negotiated meanings of home and travel in their varied, ambivalent permutations. Although some points inevitably recur throughout the book, Desai effectively generates distinct theoretical concerns from her carefully selected examples. Following a pair of rich establishing chapters, single chapters focus on Mira Nair's *Mississippi Masala,* Srinivas Krishna's *Masala,* Gurinder Chadha's *Bhaji on the Beach,* and Deepa Mehta's *Fire.* Each of these films (representing American, Canadian, and British production) has been the subject of previous critical attention, but Desai's discussions are rewarding extensions of and often convincing responses to earlier work.

Her chapter on *Fire*—the most widely discussed and certainly the most controversial of these films—is especially valuable for its extensive and judicious survey of the range of conflicting responses to the film in South Asia and elsewhere (including its institutional "home" of Canada). Desai is particularly illuminating when considering director Deepa Mehta's complex status as the film's author, whose available Indian and Canadian identities positioned her for both the film's defenders and detractors. Among other things, *Beyond Bollywood* revitalizes discussions of cinematic authorship in important and innovative ways.

The debate over *Fire*'s status as a "lesbian" film in India and North America (a designation which the director herself notoriously rejected) seems to direct Desai's final two chapters, which consider a range of films, including a growing body of recent Indian films in English (such as *Bombay Boys, Split Wide Open,* and *Hyderabad Blues,* still largely unknown outside of the South Asian diaspora despite their transnational aims), and more recent, commercially successful "feminist films" such as Chadha's *Bend It Like Beckham,* Mehta's *Bollywood/Hollywood,* and especially Nair's *Monsoon Wedding.* Desai very astutely appraises such films for their positive representations of gender as well as their "failures," especially in the treatment of "nonheteronormative" sexuality. More precisely, she argues, a film like *Monsoon Wedding* "forwards the feminist retooling of heterosexual female sexualities, acknowledges male queer sexualities, and unequivocally denies female queer ones" (227). Desai is able to convincingly weigh the strengths and limitations of such examples rather than settling for the easier praise or condemnation which has characterized many earlier responses to these films.

As I've already suggested, in some ways the book's title is unfortunate, despite the author's attempt to complicate the notion of movement "beyond." As Desai recognizes, diasporic films often parody popular Hindi cinema. She tends to view these as affectionate parodies that tellingly complicate diasporic identity, whereas I tend to find such allusions frequently condescending and a means to assert superior art cinema credibility over the easy target of vulgar, popular cinema. (*Bollywood/Hollywood* seems to me far inferior to the films it believes itself to be cleverer than, and I suspect *Monsoon Wedding* lacks the nerve to construct its musical sequences as full-fledged Hindi song sequences.) This mark of superiority often requires diasporic filmmakers to share or reinforce the uninformed Western view that the mass production of popular cinema in India must result in an undifferentiated body of formulaic films consumed by uncritical crowds.

This was, of course, once the common view of Hollywood cinema held by intellectuals, and the repetition of this collective dismissal of popular cinema by South Asian intellectuals has become untenable, as the long overdue analysis of popular Indian cinema is currently demonstrating. (In a social phenomenon that Desai does not consider, the legitimation of popular Hindi cinema is another result of the diaspora, as viewers trained to take popular culture seriously become film scholars. On the whole, the serious treatment of popular cinema has been a more daring critical enterprise than the assessment of diasporic cinema, which can assume an intellectual audience and critical response.)

Desai's own late recognition that the otherwise conservative 1994 Hindi blockbuster *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* (largely a celebration of the traditional arranged marriage) offers more space for queer reading than the liberal-feminist *Monsoon Wedding* may be less of an anomaly than a sign that Bollywood is hardly as homogeneous (or heteronormative) as its general dismissal requires one to presume. Bollywood, although a crucial backdrop to this study, thus remains more often characterized than considered as one of diasporic cinema's ambivalent sources. A telling detail may suffice: Desai quotes "the Hindi film song quintessentially associated with diaspora—*Mera Joota Hai Japani*" (77), which is heard during an early scene in *Mississippi Masala* (and invoked on the first pages of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*). I don't imagine that Desai doesn't know the song's source, Raj Kapoor's classic 1955 Hindi film *Shri 420,* but she, like Nair's

film, doesn't provide her (non-Asian) readers with this information. Yet in its original context, the song (which notes the singer's Japanese shoes, English pants, and red Russian hat before affirming his Indian heart) does *not* indicate "the proper construction of the Indian diaspora that maintains its deterritorialized cultural and national affiliation" (77), as Desai claims, but traces the recent colonial past (English pants) and Nehru's post-independence "mixed economy" (of capitalist goods from Japan and socialist affiliation with the USSR) as features of defining modern Indian identity within the nation. Desai's understanding of the song's function for Nair (or Rushdie) in the diaspora seems accurate, but also relies upon an obfuscation of the song's function in its (again, unnamed) source as a cheerful resistance to outside influence rather than an affirmation of essential identity maintained across borders. In such cases, the "Bollywood" that this study wishes to move "beyond" is thus denied its own complexity, variety, or history—including the large body of films that can only be retroactively named by the later, collapsing term "Bollywood."

Desai's discursive affiliations with contemporary postcolonial theory are apparent, and obviously relevant. Her writing, however, often relies on a terminology that becomes numbingly repetitive in its desire to foreground this theoretical inheritance. This is not a complaint about "jargon": Desai relies upon a vocabulary that is precise even if it risks excluding some potential readers. However, in this study no questions are simply "posed" or "asked" when texts and ideas can be "interrogated"—the policeman's verb that is relied upon persistently here. Again, this is a sophisticated, wide-ranging work of criticism despite what could appear to be a narrow focus; it seems to me a little unfortunate that its often dense prose will limit the access of some readers to its genuine insights. Readers conversant with postcolonial theory, however, will find *Beyond Bollywood* an important addition to the theories of representation central to the field. A lengthy filmography of South Asian diasporic films (many more than those treated fully in the text) is a valuable resource, although it omits information on distribution sources or video availability. Oddly, many of these film titles also appear in the bibliography.

COREY K. CREEKMUR teaches American and Hindi cinema at the University of Iowa, where he also directs the Institute for Cinema and Culture.

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Cinema and the Sandinistas: Filmmaking in Revolutionary Nicaragua

By Jonathan Buchsbaum. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2003. $70.00 cloth; $29.95 paper. 323 pages.

Jonathan Buchsbaum has written a very interesting, challenging, and ultimately courageous book about INCINE (the Nicaraguan Film Institute) which began soon after the Sandinistas overthrew Anastasio Somosa in 1979 and lasted until six years after the Sandinistas lost the election of 1990. The book is the first extended account of INCINE and its films in English. Buchsbaum has seen and discusses most of the 70 or so films that INCINE made.[1] He has reviewed many of the key documents and spoken to most of the main people. We are fortunate that the book is so well researched and written, because there probably won't be another one on the market soon.

The book is also very challenging because Buchsbaum stays true to the chaotic, contradictory situation in which these filmmakers worked, including their many unrealistic fantasies about what could be done and their terrible isolation from both the rest of Sandinista culture and from the heart of the Sandinista revolution—the mass organizations. Finally, I find the book courageous because, while we can expect periodic revivals of the French New Wave, Italian Neo-Realism, Brazilian, and Cuban cinemas, we are not likely to see one of INCINE's work any time soon, at least not in the U.S.A.

In a certain sad, even perhaps hysterical way, the INCINE filmmakers understood that to make a place for themselves on the cinema map they had to make successful feature fiction films in a situation in which that was not materially possible. The author quotes Iván Argüello as saying, "INCINE was a utopia that had to fail"(248). Buchsbaum carefully lays out why their vision was utopian and why it ultimately had to fail. But in the end, he also speculates about a path not taken that just might have produced a different result.

Buchsbaum begins by relating the accidental circumstances under which he came to write the book. During the 1989-90 academic year, he went to Nicaragua to teach. Once there, he met a number of the INCINE filmmakers and hung out with them. He saw all the INCINE films and interviewed many of the participants. While he never dips into (or not very far into) gossip, his familiarity with the people gives him a rich sense of each film's context and production process. These friendships and conversations give a heightened sense of the personal, political, material, and aesthetic contradictions in which these filmmakers worked.

Many of the Institute's leaders and main filmmakers were ambitious upper- and middle-class Nicaraguans (e.g., Ramiro Lacayo, Frank Pineda, Mariano Marín, Iván Argüello, and Rafael Vargas). Most of them participated in the revolution and supported its goals, but they were usually not militants and were often critical of the Sandinistas. They saw themselves more as bohemian artists than revolutionaries. They worked in a government institute, but received insufficient support from it. The government, to the extent that it paid any attention to them at all, seemed to want them to make didactic documentaries, while the filmmakers wanted to make artistic features. The cultural establishment for the most part ignored them. They received substantial support from the Cubans to make newsreels and documentaries but, of course, they mainly admired the classic Cuban features of the 1960s and early 1970s.

For most of the book, Buchsbaum goes carefully through the short history of INCINE, detailing most of the films and teasing out the political/aesthetic/personal struggles he sees in them. A good example is *Bananeras* (Ramiro Lacayo,

film, doesn't provide her (non-Asian) readers with this information. Yet in its original context, the song (which notes the singer's Japanese shoes, English pants, and red Russian hat before affirming his Indian heart) does *not* indicate "the proper construction of the Indian diaspora that maintains its deterritorialized cultural and national affiliation" (77), as Desai claims, but traces the recent colonial past (English pants) and Nehru's post-independence "mixed economy" (of capitalist goods from Japan and socialist affiliation with the USSR) as features of defining modern Indian identity within the nation. Desai's understanding of the song's function for Nair (or Rushdie) in the diaspora seems accurate, but also relies upon an obfuscation of the song's function in its (again, unnamed) source as a cheerful resistance to outside influence rather than an affirmation of essential identity maintained across borders. In such cases, the "Bollywood" that this study wishes to move "beyond" is thus denied its own complexity, variety, or history—including the large body of films that can only be retroactively named by the later, collapsing term "Bollywood."

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For most of the book, Buchsbaum goes carefully through the short history of INCINE, detailing most of the films and teasing out the political/aesthetic/personal struggles he sees in them. A good example is *Bananeras* (Ramiro Lacayo,

1982), which is also, as far as I can tell, the most available in the U.S. The documentary focuses on the banana industry still run, at the time of shooting, by Standard Fruit. The film includes lovely color and black-and-white shots of the old plantation house and the lush rural area, with a particularly haunting shot of a slightly built worker attached by a chain to huge stalks of bananas, dragging those bananas on an overhead cable to the processing plant. The film also includes wonderful juxtapositions of this current footage with Somoza-era newsreels, cheerfully touting the importance of new technology in the banana industry (at least at the processing end). Since the industry was run by Standard Fruit under contract with the Sandinistas, this film could be seen as critical of them. Lacayo leaves out any mention of the workers' union or of the gender differences still persisting and clear in the film. These are typical of the contradictions Buchsbaum finds in many of the INCINE films. Buchsbaum describes the increasing desire to make fiction films as the filmmakers include more and more fictional episodes/recreations in their documentaries, which themselves become longer and longer.

Buchsbaum comes to two major conclusions in the last chapter: world cinema had changed in a way that disadvantaged the kind of filmmaking the INCINE people hoped to practice, and with a better theory/politics these filmmakers may not have had to fail after all. In the case of the first conclusion, the author argues: "One hundred years after the invention of the cinema, national cinemas themselves may be anachronistic as a project of national identity. Independently of the collapse of the socialist world, constructing national cinema no longer has either the cachet or the social purpose once attached to it (237)." He goes on to argue that Hollywood domination of production and distribution of entertainment film, the precipitous rise of television, the astonishing decrease in film theaters around the world, and the mass availability of video, films on CD and now DVD technology have all led to the fact that "cinema no longer occupies the privileged place it once held as a projection of national consolidation" (ibid.). Thus the desires and fantasies of the INCINE filmmakers were antiquated, like wanting to make a better buggy at just the time Henry Ford opened his first auto factory.

Then Buchbaum dives head first into the morass of "Third Cinema," a full decade or so after any sustained discussion of it. Working primarily with a series of publications by and interviews with Octavio Getino (who co-directed *Hour of the Furnaces* with Fernando Solanas and worked as a film censor in Juan Perón's government in the early 1970s), Buchsbaum arrives at a notion of "militant" cinema. In his view, it "clearly represents [for Solanas and Getino] a privileged internal category of third cinema" (233). For him, militant cinema is a filmmaking process (and one must add, I think, video and other media) in which politicized media makers worked closely with political organizations in order to contribute both to popular education/consciousness-raising and to political organizing as a way to help create social change.

We can see a very good example of this direction in Iván Argüello's *Mujeres de la Frontera* (*Women Along the Border,* 1985-86). This nearly hour-long color fiction film strongly echoes the famous Cuban feature of the 1960s, *Lucia* (Humberto Solás, 1968). Argüello's film follows the rising political and feminist consciousness of a peasant woman, Josefina, whose life drastically changes because of the Contra war. When her village's men go off to join the fight against the Contras, the women are moved to unpleasant and unhealthy quarters in a nearby town. Josefina leads a movement to return to their village and grow the food they need. Later, when the men return to the flourishing village, they resent the women's new assertiveness. One angry man tries to pull his wife off a tractor she has learned to drive. The other women restrain him.

Though certainly rough in spots (e.g., using a voiceover by the main character to cover gaps in the available footage), the film is grittily realistic and shows the growing consciousness and assertiveness of the peasant women with great subtlety. This is one of the few INCINE films in which the filmmakers worked closely with popular organizations (a women's organization and a farmers' organization). In my view, this film would qualify as what Buchsbaum calls militant cinema. INCINE might well have had a more powerful impact on Nicaraguan audiences and garnered more support within the country had they made more such films.

We will never know, of course, what could have been, but in Latin America INCINE lasted longer than any other sustained effort except in Cuba to create a left-wing national cinema. But INCINE did more than just persevere, and Buchsbaum ends on a positive note, giving credit where it is due: "INCINE may not have produced many feature films, but the variety of themes, formal invention and implicit political interpretation in its corpus provides a rich reflection and commentary on an exciting popular revolution" (248).

Finally, I think that Jonathan Buchsbaum has mapped out for us all a territory that would otherwise be unfamiliar, if not completely unknown, to most English-language film scholars. He has not just written a very good history of this institution and its films, but has also set that work in a very clear context. He has been firmly critical of the filmmakers' faults, but also warmly forgiving—he clearly sees the many challenges they faced. We can all be grateful to him for raising issues of such interest for everyone involved in both documentary and intentionally political film.

NOTE

1. It would have been very useful for the author to give us some sense of where we might see, rent, or purchase any of the films that INCINE produced. For example, First Run Icarus Films (<www.frif.com>) sells and/or rents a few of the films: *Bananera, Centerfielder, Breaking Silence,* and *Committed Cinema.* The Latin American Video Archive (<www.lava.org>) also has some of the films for sale. Finally, in this regard, the book badly needs a filmography of all the INCINE films.

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Cinema of the Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film

By Dina Iordanova. London: Wallflower Press, 2003. $65.00 cloth; $22.00 paper. 224 pages.

None of the many offerings of the London-based Wallflower Press seems more essential and timely than Dina Iordanova's *Cinema of the Other Europe.* With her companion study of Balkan cinema (*Cinema of Flames,* BFI, 2001) Iordanova's two books provide the most informed and comprehensive assessment of East European film in the English language. Not that there is much competition in that long-neglected area. Available book-length studies have dealt either with national cinemas (Liehm [1974] on Czech; Petrie [1978] on Hungarian; Michalek [1988] and Haltof [2002] on Polish; Goulding [1985] on Yugoslav); specific periods, such as Czech New Wave (Hames, 1985); or prominent directors such as Wajda, Forman, Mészáros, Kusturica, and especially Kieslowski (who has not one but seven books devoted to his films, and that's just in English). The rest are essays, either in edited collections such as David Paul's (1983) and Daniel Goulding's (1989), or scattered widely in a variety of academic journals and professional magazines. For one-volume reliable reference there is the out-of-print and inevitably outdated *Handbook of Soviet and East European Films and Filmmakers,* edited by Thomas Slater (1992), and the fairly recent (2000) but disappointing *BFI Companion to Eastern European and Russian Cinema* (co-edited, incidentally, by Iordanova). Even the Liehms' *The Most Important Art: Soviet and East European Film After 1945* (1977), which, before Iordanova's book, was the only comprehensive survey of Eastern European cinema, could not overcome the established geopolitics and see its subject autonomously—i.e., apart from Soviet cinema—or at least transnationally, as a region rather than country by country. And that's what Iordanova's *Cinema of the Other Europe* does so well—and far more.

Her book is truly groundbreaking because she presents such an extensive and compelling justification for the autonomous status of East European cinema and film studies. In her commitment "to discuss the forest not the trees," as she puts it, she first redefines the forest by restoring it to its strongest and primary roots (2). Her "forest" is East Central Europe, specifically the countries of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, a region drawn together by common traditions and shared aspirations. What binds them together are cherished experiences of short-lived prewar national autonomy and democracy, as well as bitter ones of betrayal by Western powers, of abandonment to the Soviets in the aftermath of World War II, and, most importantly, of the shared struggle, for more than four decades, against cultural Russification, political oppression, economic deprivation, and social and cultural isolation from the West.

Iordanova does regret the necessary exclusion of East Germany (DDR)—since 1989 a closed chapter of Europe's history—especially since it was such an odd, yet integral, part of East Central Europe and because it was so instantly rendered obsolete upon Germany's reunification; but she compensates for that with frequent references to East German films and new research on the subject. As for Bulgaria, Romania (whose film industries since 1990 have practically shut down), and the countries of former Yugoslavia, they are the subjects of her earlier, similarly pioneering study of Balkan cinema.

It is her two introductory chapters, in which she outlines her field and argues the issues, that are the most innovative and valuable parts of the book. The book's closing chapter is its other undeniable asset, as it provides the first transnational review of the ways East Central European film has evolved since 1989. In just under 20 pages, Iordanova identifies the changes in the film industry, discusses the region's new generations of filmmakers, and the ways their films reflect and respond to the new reality while continuing to display and reveal qualities that distinguish their cinema from that of the rest of Europe. Here, as everywhere else in her book, she is wonderfully perceptive and articulate, her writing almost consistently sharp and lean.

My criticism of the book concerns its middle portions, chapters 3 through 6, and addresses not the content but the organization. Those chapters are the factual bulk of Iordanova's study, the actual body of evidence—a survey of the region's representative cinema—but her approach to East Central European cinema as a distinctive concept and entity demands that she arrange her material by themes, periods, and styles, and not by countries, directors, or national movements. And that's where her book gets to be somewhat chaotic, often inconsistent or simply random—in short, needlessly complicated. She separates her discussion of historical films into two parts (chapters 3 and 4), under vague, inevitably overlapping, and ultimately meaningless headings of "Narratives of Identity" and "Discourse on Morality." Chapter 4 is not just about "the cinematic representations of Holocaust," as promised in the book's introduction; it begins with a discussion of Jancsó's *The Round-Up* and *The Red and the White,* set respectively in 1868 and 1919, and ends with films (*Angi Vera, Man of Marble, The Joke*) about the experiences of postwar totalitarianism. Chapter 5 is even more problematic. Titled "State Socialist Modernity," it's meant to survey films set in contemporary reality (both urban and rural) and dealing with contemporary issues, but some of the films she includes—among them Wajda's *Wedding* and *Birchwood,* and Kazimierz Kutz's celebrations of Silesian culture in *Pearl in the Crown*—are quite removed from the present. To complicate things even further, the chapter also contains brief surveys of the Czech New Wave, Poland's Cinema of Moral Concern, cinematic representations of the Gypsies and their culture, and a category of "apolitical political [existential] films," all thrown together just because they do, roughly, fit the chapter's broad title. The organization seems most incidental in Part III, which, despite its title "Films and Filmmakers," settles on discussions of cinema by and/or about women (Chapter 6) and on films of the post-Communist years (Chapter 7). This disorienting lack of focus could have been avoided if Iordanova had taken more time to divide her material into simpler, more manageable categories (how about the old-fashioned genres and periods?), and had omitted the

unhelpful intertitles (e.g., "The Grayness of Everyday Life," "In Search of Privacy: Loneliness, Betrayal, Solidarity," or "Subtle Psychology"). As it is, we are given a separate chapter on films by and about women which could have been part of the general thematic narrative, or, for instance, we are forced to search for comments about Zanussi's work in a dozen different places in the book.

Reading *Cinema of the Other Europe,* I couldn't help wishing it were another hundred pages longer. But we have to accept what it sacrificed and unfortunately compromised. Discussion of "the cinema of moral concern" is reduced to an interesting but unfair celebration of Krzysztof Kieslowski's career as the representative of the movement and its contributions at the expense of other, more involved directors such as Agnieszka Holland or Wojciech Marczewski. István Szabó also gets short shrift, his key contributions receiving no more than a page of attention. In fact, much fascinating, often critical, commentary gets relegated to the endnote section, the very size of which (almost 30 packed pages) is best evidence that the author felt some pressure to trim her material. There are also some unhappy omissions (Marek Piwowski and the Kondratiuk brothers for cult Polish comedy, or auteurs like Piotr Szulkin and Andrzej Zulawski), a few errors (such as the absence of Márta Mészáros from the index), a rather limited bibliography, and an index without film titles (they are listed alphabetically in a separate filmography).

But these are all shortcomings that can be easily overcome in the later editions. And I hope Iordanova's book gets republished in an expanded form, because it has all the makings of a classic standard text. Her discussions of the films are rich in detail and insight. She dispels myths and corrects common stereotypes and misconceptions about the subject, and identifies the many areas and dimensions of East Central European cinema that make the field ripe for further scholarly exploration: popular genres; traditions of animation and the documentary; extensive cultural exchanges inside the Bloc and outside it with many non-Western, often Third World countries; and the complex implications of the state-run film industry. Currently, the area of East Central European film studies draws together a small group of devoted scholars and critics, many of whom Iordanova acknowledges in her book. I hope its publication, together with much easier access to information about the region's cinema (in such inestimable online film journals as *Kinoeye* and *Central Europe Review*) and the steadily expanding availability of films themselves, will revive interest in the past and present of the "Other Europe" and its unique and versatile cinema.

TOMASZ WARCHOL is an associate professor in the Department of Literature and Philosophy at Georgia Southern University in Statesboro; he co-directs Reel Savannah Film Group.

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Cold War, Cool Medium: Television, McCarthyism, and American Culture

By Thomas Doherty. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003. $27.95. 305 pages.

Thanks to TV Land and *Pleasantville,* conventional wisdom states that early television was a saccharine, repressive repository of simplistic ideals, and thus an ideal soapbox for the launching of Joseph McCarthy's ultra-reactionary diatribes. Thomas Doherty's *Cold War, Cool Medium* takes issue with that impression, providing a riveting revisionist history of how McCarthyism played out on television screens in the 1950s. Although Doherty, a prolific media historian and Chair of Film Studies at Brandeis University, certainly agrees that 50s television and McCarthyism were bound together tightly, he seeks to correct the traditional account, provided by such historians as Erik Barnouw, that the Cold War all but strangled freedom of expression on the nascent medium. In contrast to this view, Doherty argues that television in fact managed to "utter defiance and encourage resistance" (3) in ways that historians have yet to fully recognize. Through close textual analysis of the existing televisual evidence from the period, as well as thorough research into trade papers and archival materials that fill in the gaps in that record, Doherty constructs a compelling argument. While television in the 1950s did indeed exhibit a timidity borne of corporate backing, the young medium's insatiable need for material, especially live spectacle, helped destroy as well as create Joseph McCarthy.

Throughout the book, Doherty acknowledges the now-familiar connections between early television and McCarthyism, both of which relied heavily on the power of visual spectacle to take root within American culture. But in Doherty's view, that very spectacle has misled previous historians about the true roles of both during the Cold War. Because of the television image's iconic power, and because of the limited quantity of surviving visual materials from the period, McCarthy has been given far more credit for the anti-Communist crusade than he actually deserves, and television has received far too much blame for being his handmaiden. Doherty contends that, despite the impression left by memoirs, films, and television shows about the Red Scare, there was indeed a considerable backlash against the blacklist at the time, and much of this criticism was readily visible on television. As he eloquently writes, "To tune in to the television of Cold War America is to see a portrait more textured and multicolored than the monochrome shades fogging the popular imagination" (18).

Yet Doherty is not looking through rose-colored glasses himself. Throughout the text, he highlights the many ridiculous conformities that commercialism imposed on television content and that have led so many historians to equate 1950s television with the repressive politics that McCarthy espoused. However, Doherty establishes a key distinction between the two in his opening chapter: "Dependent for sustenance on the very freedoms that McCarthyism restricted,

unhelpful intertitles (e.g., "The Grayness of Everyday Life," "In Search of Privacy: Loneliness, Betrayal, Solidarity," or "Subtle Psychology"). As it is, we are given a separate chapter on films by and about women which could have been part of the general thematic narrative, or, for instance, we are forced to search for comments about Zanussi's work in a dozen different places in the book.

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Cold War, Cool Medium: Television, McCarthyism, and American Culture

By Thomas Doherty. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003. $27.95. 305 pages.

Thanks to TV Land and *Pleasantville,* conventional wisdom states that early television was a saccharine, repressive repository of simplistic ideals, and thus an ideal soapbox for the launching of Joseph McCarthy's ultra-reactionary diatribes. Thomas Doherty's *Cold War, Cool Medium* takes issue with that impression, providing a riveting revisionist history of how McCarthyism played out on television screens in the 1950s. Although Doherty, a prolific media historian and Chair of Film Studies at Brandeis University, certainly agrees that 50s television and McCarthyism were bound together tightly, he seeks to correct the traditional account, provided by such historians as Erik Barnouw, that the Cold War all but strangled freedom of expression on the nascent medium. In contrast to this view, Doherty argues that television in fact managed to "utter defiance and encourage resistance" (3) in ways that historians have yet to fully recognize. Through close textual analysis of the existing televisual evidence from the period, as well as thorough research into trade papers and archival materials that fill in the gaps in that record, Doherty constructs a compelling argument. While television in the 1950s did indeed exhibit a timidity borne of corporate backing, the young medium's insatiable need for material, especially live spectacle, helped destroy as well as create Joseph McCarthy.

Throughout the book, Doherty acknowledges the now-familiar connections between early television and McCarthyism, both of which relied heavily on the power of visual spectacle to take root within American culture. But in Doherty's view, that very spectacle has misled previous historians about the true roles of both during the Cold War. Because of the television image's iconic power, and because of the limited quantity of surviving visual materials from the period, McCarthy has been given far more credit for the anti-Communist crusade than he actually deserves, and television has received far too much blame for being his handmaiden. Doherty contends that, despite the impression left by memoirs, films, and television shows about the Red Scare, there was indeed a considerable backlash against the blacklist at the time, and much of this criticism was readily visible on television. As he eloquently writes, "To tune in to the television of Cold War America is to see a portrait more textured and multicolored than the monochrome shades fogging the popular imagination" (18).

Yet Doherty is not looking through rose-colored glasses himself. Throughout the text, he highlights the many ridiculous conformities that commercialism imposed on television content and that have led so many historians to equate 1950s television with the repressive politics that McCarthy espoused. However, Doherty establishes a key distinction between the two in his opening chapter: "Dependent for sustenance on the very freedoms that McCarthyism restricted,

the medium was preprogrammed for resistance" (18). Just as television readily gave McCarthy the air time to make his fevered accusations, the medium also offered shows like "America's Forum of the Air," whose format enabled a studio audience of average America citizens to grill McCarthy relentlessly, exposing the illogic in his arguments that would ultimately bring about his downfall. The bottom line for the existence of such a show was economic, not political—"television needed to fill the air time," as Doherty points out (18)—but the impact was potentially profound.

After establishing this core argument early on, *Cold War, Cool Medium* artfully structures its chapters to lead the reader through the evidence and logic that supports it. For instance, Chapter 4 opens with an assessment of the absurdities wrought by "sponsor-mandated hypersensitivity" (66), as Doherty terms it, such as General Motors' demand that the name "Ford" not be uttered in a teleplay about the Lincoln assassination at Ford Theater. In another astounding instance, a lone woman in Connecticut complained to her union about the portrayal of a rude telephone operator in an NBC anthology drama, prompting the sponsor, ad agency, and network responsible for the program to issue apologies. Such examples seemingly take us down the track of the traditional argument against 1950s television, that it was too beholden to sponsors to ever be a progressive force in society. But in the second half of this chapter, Doherty shows that the same motives responsible for such absurdities also brought considerable social progress, such as in the depiction of African Americans. While most imagine early television as an all-white world, largely because of the particular shows from the period that have been preserved for syndication, Doherty's research into lesser-known programs and trade papers from the period illustrates that variety shows, anthology dramas, and television news all brought African-American faces into living rooms across the country, meaning that television was in fact "far more integrated than public facilities or private relationships offscreen" (71). And in Doherty's view, it was so because early television desperately needed talent in front of the camera to fill hour after hour, and it could not afford to be very picky about skin color. Additionally, the same sponsors and networks who feared offending telephone operators in Connecticut also feared offending black audiences across the country, including organizations like the NAACP.

Subsequent chapters continue this argument that television's very weaknesses could also be strengths, and these chapters progressively connect that logic to television's role in the fall of McCarthy. As Doherty illustrates, those who best understood the unique properties of television stood to gain the most, and the book's pivotal chapters on McCarthy's final months in the limelight illustrate that the senator did not understand the medium and lost greatly as a result. Edward R. Murrow's legendary "See It Now" takedown of McCarthy packaged together McCarthy's own venomous and contradictory words, with the episode capped off by a stirring, poetic speech by Murrow. Conversely, McCarthy's equal-time response was an arid, stultifying lecture, which *Billboard* subsequently criticized not for its polemics but for being "poor in quality with spotty cutting and monotonous one-camera shots" (186). Similarly, during the Army-McCarthy hearings, McCarthy's poise was famously annihilated by defense attorney Joseph Welch's legendary retort, "Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last?" Doherty speculates that these words were carefully pre-planned and strategically timed by Welch, who knew the impact they would have on those in the gallery and, even more significantly, in living rooms across the country.

As indicated by the title of the book, Doherty also argues that McCarthy's struggles in such moments reflect Marshall McLuhan's designation of television as a "cool medium" that rewards a "low-pressure style of presentation" and "rejects the sharp personality" (247). Accordingly, McCarthy's "hot personality melted under the glare of television" (190). This is actually one of the more tenuous claims in the book, since Doherty's own research illustrates how historically specific cultural and industrial circumstances influenced the McCarthy mythos more so than any of the medium's essentialist qualities. While it offers up a nice title, the "cool medium" concept is not very illuminating here.

Instead, it is Doherty's creative historical research that sheds the most revealing light on 1950s television. Given the challenges of researching such an ephemeral period of television history, Doherty does an admirable job of scouring through trade papers to fill in for missing visual materials, and his archival research uncovers such fascinating tidbits as an FBI memorandum dated one week before the suicide of blacklisted actor Philip Loeb that, tragically unbeknownst to Loeb, cleared him of all suspicion. Doherty's examples also range from the familiar, such as Nixon's Checkers speech, to the more obscure, such as TV superstar Lucille Ball's brief flirtation with the blacklist. The latter example also contains several examples of the writing style that makes Doherty's books so readable. For instance, referencing allegations that Ball had registered to vote for the Communist Party ticket in 1936, Doherty writes that "the notion of the zany redhead in cahoots with the reds conjures up a madcap sitcom scenario—imagine a teenage Lucy MacGillicuddy muscling her way into a Federal Theatre Project production of *The Cradle Will Rock* with calamitous results" (52). Like Doherty's earlier books, including *Teenagers and Teenpics* and *Pre-Code Hollywood*, *Cold War, Cool Medium* is engagingly written, offering prose that is brimming with wit and insight.

The book is also directed toward a general readership rather than an academic one. This is certainly a plus for its readability, but the scholarly audience will be frustrated by the book's citation format, as source references are not footnoted within the body of the text. Instead, all sources are referenced in a "Notes" section in the appendix. This will no doubt cause a measure of aggravation since the reader is never sure until checking at the back of the book if an idea is Doherty's own or taken from an outside source. More importantly, not all of the evidence appears to have a corresponding note supporting it.

At the same time, Doherty's book offers the valuable historiographic lesson that television scholars cannot lean on

existing visual materials alone to formulate their assumptions about the historical legacy of the medium. One cannot separate the image on the screen from its political, cultural, and economic contexts. After all, it was economic self-interest that propelled ABC to air the Army-McCarthy hearings in the 1950s—they had no other programming to offer affiliates at the time—thereby ensuring television's participation in McCarthy's destruction. It is also economic self-interest that prompts TV Land to air "The Donna Reed Show" rather than "America's Forum of the Air." Both shows represent a piece of television history, but only one represents it in the collective consciousness of contemporary popular culture. It is this selective memory that makes so powerful Doherty's central argument that "[d]uring the Cold War, through television, American became a more open and tolerant place" (2). It is unfortunate that so few TV Land viewers can imagine such a place ever existed.

CHRISTINE BECKER is an assistant professor at the University of Notre Dame; she is currently completing a book about the role of Hollywood film stars on 1950s television. Her next project will analyze contemporary changes in British and American broadcasting.

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Film Editing: The Art of the Expressive

By Valerie Orpen. London: Wallflower Press, 2003. $17.50. 138 pages.

This slim but detailed volume, part of the Short Cuts series, is a welcome addition to the subject of motion picture editing. The target audience here is academics, critics, theorists, cineastes, and cinema studies programs. Orpen's solid thesis establishes a critical dialogue contending that classical mise-en-scène and auteur studies have either long ignored the art and craft of editing or attributed editorial decisions to the director.

As she rightly states in the introduction, books of interviews with editors are "largely concerned with the motivations behind editing rather than the end result." Technical handbooks focus on the *how* not the *why,* and many textbooks or volumes that deal with the totality of filmmaking present rules, principles, and systems of editing, but rarely deal with how directors and editors utilize editing to express their vision in the same manner as the other film crafts. Orpen attempts to reveal how the tools and nature of editing are an integral part of cinematic personal expression.

The organization of *Film Editing* sets up a simple structure to contain a steady flow of editorial observations. The introduction is an overview of the editing process and how it has been presented in the existing literature. Part I is devoted to the traditional Hollywood continuity system and spends most of its capital utilizing *Rear Window* as an example, demonstrating how that system evolved after the demise of the studios in the 1960s. Part II gives the European perspective by investigating Godard's *Breathless.* Part III centers on how the star system influenced editing choices and patterns that became part of the traditional language, as well as presenting the European alternative. The conclusion calls for a new manner of examining editing not as a rigid system, but as another expressive tool at the director's disposal.

In general, when studying editing, postproduction can be explored theoretically or practically. Orpen has chosen the former, and she focuses on developing a critical/theoretical dialectic. In addition to her own views, she draws upon a wide range of academics and cinematic philosophers such as Nöel Burch, David Bordwell, and Roland Barthes. Exceptions who speak from a position of practice are Martin Scorsese's long-time editor Thelma Schoonmaker and editor/director/educator Edward Dmytryk. Orpen often does not allow available practical knowledge to influence and clarify her discussion of continuity editing in Hollywood, counter-continuity editing by the French New Wave, or a combination of those opposites evidenced in the American New Wave.

There is a lengthy and insightful discussion on the narrative properties inherent in the point-of-view shot compiled from the work of a number of theorists; however, Orpen often does little more than agree with her colleagues. She does break down most of the instances of POV without generalization, emphasizing that the material available to the editor was narratively complex in its presentation of what characters see and how the audience interprets what is shown.

The analysis of *Rear Window* continues neither in an original manner nor as a laboratory investigation of how editorial technique and language structure the story, but offers a convoluted argument concerning the oft-discussed Kuleshov effect, suggesting that *Rear Window* is a critique of that legendary editorial experiment. Orpen finally engages in a more specific analysis of how editorial grammar interacts with dialogue, the purpose of shot size in expressing the emotional life of the characters, and how time is presented editorially. Fades are discussed in their specific structural role in *Rear Window.* The conclusion of the analysis reverts to the tired but true connection between cinema and voyeurism.

Raging Bull is Orpen's best analysis in uncovering the strategies of personal filmmaking and expressive editing. She focuses on the specifics of Scorsese's intent and Schoonmaker's editorial method in achieving the director's vision of presenting a period film with an assertive, modern approach to editing that applies innovation and deconstruction of the classical Hollywood style. This lively and original discussion of expressive editing techniques results in defining a bold new mise-en-scène that was created for the specificity of *Raging Bull*'s narrative purposes.

Orpen's analysis of Godard's *Breathless* is little more than a compendium of over 40 years of opinion that fails to probe how the forging of a new editorial aesthetic, fueled by an innovative application of the jump cut, provided relevance for films that followed. Europe's alternative to the American continuity system is successfully examined in a discussion of *Borsalino,* and *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce 1080 Bruxelles.* Orpen traces the "origins of continuity editing" by stating that early newsreels utilized an editing system that "unified a series of disparate shots." This process was then applied to fictional films "to allow the narrative to flow coher-

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ently and to enhance narrative comprehension." Everything in cinema has a pre-history. Opren's point is well taken but exaggerated: it ignores Kristin Thompson's careful study of early fiction film. Orpen reports that the principles of continuity editing are still applied to contemporary cinema and suggests the system's adherence to strict editorial rules stifles emotion and expression. She concludes that the continuity system is more complex and contradictory than has been acknowledged by historians: Hollywood Studio films were not as conventional as previously held, and New Hollywood editing not always as revolutionary.

Throughout *Film Editing: The Art of the Expressive* the author uses cinema studies terminology rather than established editorial language to empower the reader with both schools of thought. To indicate *intercutting,* the author often chooses *alternation*—correct and suitable for critical analysis, but not the term of choice in practice. The term *optical* is used rather than *editing transitions.* Although an optical printer was employed in Orpen's examples of pre-digitally edited films, she misses an opportunity to engage the reader in emerging editing aesthetics.

However, Orpen more than succeeds in arguing that editing and editors express emotion and narrative, and that post-production is not the auteur's exclusive domain. For this point alone, *Film Editing: The Art of the Expressive* is a valuable bridge between the academic and the practical. What Orpen gets right is admirable. For example, she defines the two major directorial approaches; deep focus/long takes, and montage/short takes and courageously calls on filmmakers to "redress the balance." The traditional discussion presents a one-or-the-other directorial philosophy, but here Orpen is on the cutting edge of contemporary film, where these two radically different directorial approaches are intertwined to address the specifics of a film's narrative, and style. The editorial rules of the Classical Hollywood style are clarified with explanations of the 180-degree rule, eyeline match, cutting on action and movement, and shifts in shot scale—all significant contributions to motion picture storytelling.

It is not so much that *Film Editing: The Art of the Expressive* covers new ground, but it does openly challenge the way editing has been presented and calls for a new era where the focus is on personal expression—the element that gives a film its voice. Orpen wants more attention paid to how the editorial process achieves this. She concludes by encouraging future work on the expressive art of editing and the merging of editing and mise-en-scène analysis. A useful appendix has a detailed shot-by-shot listing of the sequences discussed. A short but helpful glossary is provided. There are chapter notes, a filmography, and an excellent bibliography divided into essential and secondary readings, but no index.

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Irish National Cinema

By Ruth Barton. New York: Routledge, 2004. $80.00 cloth; $23.95 paper. 214 pages.

Ruth Barton's *Irish National Cinema,* a recent addition to Routledge's National Cinemas series, contributes to the burgeoning scholarship on Irish cinema inaugurated by John Hill, Luke Gibbons, and Kevin Rockett's *Cinema and Ireland* (1987) and reinvigorated by Lance Pettit's *Screening Ireland: Film and Television Representation* (2000) and Martin McLoone's *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema* (2000).

Barton's book, like Pettit's and McLoone's, presents a national cinema narrative that begins with the birth of Irish film in the 1910s; describes mid-century incursions of British and American filmmakers (who not only created a romanticized visual rhetoric of screen Irishness, but also monopolized Ardmore studios, crowding out the local industry); and concludes in the final years of the twentieth century with the rise of a commercially successful national cinema. Although Pettit places the birth of Irish national cinema in the 1970s, McLoone acknowledges the filmmakers of the 70s while locating the transformative moment somewhere between *My Left Foot* (Jim Sheridan, 1989) and *The Crying Game* (Neil Jordan, 1992). Barton designates 1993 as Irish film's annus mirabilis because of the reappearance of the Irish Film Board, a government funding agency founded in 1981 and disestablished in 1987. Barton's choice makes sense if the definition of a national cinema is restricted to a government-supported commercial enterprise. But Pettit's and McLoone's broader scope—encompassing indigenous filmmakers and recognizing the paradox that a national cinema comes to be defined as such in an international context—offers a richer sense of the diversity of contemporary Irish filmmaking.

Barton combines a historical framework in the first half of the book, which covers Irish cinema from its inception to the 1960s, with a thematic analysis of contemporary films in the second half. This asymmetrical approach is hinted at in the opening chapter, where Barton sets out guiding principles of analysis through six layered statements. Her statements reflect the multidimensionality of national cinema studies, a field whose object of study has fractured in (mostly) productive ways in the wake of contemporary theories of nationalism, postcolonialism, and global film culture. The first statement establishes Barton's frame of reference: she describes Irish national cinema with broad brush strokes as a "body of films made inside and outside of Ireland that addresses both the local and diasporic cultures" (5). This body includes an archive of images of Ireland produced by foreign cinema cultures as well as indigenous counter-images (6-7). The third element is the economic configuration of the film industry—specifically its domination by international finance. The fourth question concerns the cinema's dialogue with its national culture, which, in the case of Ireland, Barton cogently writes, "has evolved from being the articulation of an aspiration (revolution), to the expression of a collective identity (the stabilization of the

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nation-state) to a means of fracturing that identity (postmodern identity politics)" (9). Barton's fifth element deals with the importance of evaluating Irish film as film, rather than in literary-critical terms. Finally, Barton seeks to address historical practices of reception.

The author is to be commended for her nuanced attention to the varied concepts and practices that impinge on any discussion of "the national." Yet the sheer diversity of these potential approaches threatens to overwhelm any project of this kind, and Barton's book succumbs to the complexity of the task the author has set for herself. The trouble with trying to do it all becomes evident early on. Chapter 2 addresses the development of an Irish-themed cinema in the U.S. and Ireland; its well-researched historical accounts are interspersed with competent narrative analyses of several films in the context of Irish nationalism during the decade of the Easter Rising (1916), such as *Knocknagow* (1917) and *Willy Reilly and His Colleen Bawn* (1920). Discussions of film reception, however, rely on limited historical information and speculative textual analysis. Because Barton briefly mentions Frantz Fanon's notion of compromise and cites Antonio Gramsci in the chapter's conclusion, it seems fair to consider whether their frameworks might have better organized the chapter—particularly given Barton's earlier assertion that film was a genuinely proletarian cultural form in Ireland in this period.

Chapter 3 examines filmmaking and film consumption in Ireland in the immediate post-Independence years. Barton argues that censorship and cinema reform were based upon Catholic doctrine but were also consistent with the Irish Free State's desire to construct a national self-image based on agrarian self-sufficiency. Barton then turns to emigration—a defining characteristic of Irish culture in the post-famine era—mentioning émigré directors Rex Ingram and Brian Desmond Hurst. This discussion leads, in turn, to textual analyses of Irish immigrant melodramas. While the topics Barton covers are relevant to national cinema scholarship, these subjects are neither fully addressed on an individual basis nor sufficiently integrated to produce a clear understanding of "contested images," the chapter's title.

The second half of the book is devoted to thematic analyses of a number of films made since 1993 by directors such as Alan Gilsenan, Pat Murphy, Bob Quinn, Thaddeus O'Sullivan, and Neil Jordan. Barton frames this section of the book broadly around filmmakers who "deconstruct received notions of Irish images and themes . . . and . . . confront the issues that were emerging within Irish society as modernization took increasing hold," including emigration, religion, nationalism, and feminism (85). Barton distinguishes the filmmaking of the 1970s (formally risky) from that of the 1980s and 90s (with its greater emphasis on narrative coherence) and, in later chapters, considers gender and nationalism, the representation of history, the heritage film, and Northern Ireland. While the explicit focus on the politics of representation introduces a welcome coherence, Barton's "received notions" and the mechanisms of their deconstruction are not adequately elaborated, so it is difficult to identify rhetorical schemata or recurring themes against which these contemporary directors work.

For example, in her discussion of Neil Jordan's *Michael Collins* (1996) in Chapter 8, Barton draws briefly on scholarly discussions of epic form and classical realism, describing *Michael Collins* as a "closed" discourse that presents history as knowable and situates the events as firmly in the past (144). This conclusion, however, contradicts the terms of discussion introduced at the chapter's opening. There, Barton argues that Irish films about the past say more about the times in which they are made than the ones they depict, and characterizes the contemporary era by its rejection of grand narratives (130-32). Jordan's film fails to convey the postmodern incredulity toward metanarratives, a fact Barton does not address. Instead, she discusses the fact that the film's *reception* reflects the times, as "individual historians, media commentators and the general run of newspaper letter writers competed with each other to establish their interpretation of the events" (142). The shift from treating the film as an interpretation of history to the fact that its existence incited a flurry of diverse opinion on historical events is problematic, particularly since she cites nothing in the film itself that fueled controversy. She concludes that *Michael Collins* fails "in its project of bridging the past and the present"— a surprising project ascribed to a film she has argued is reliant on epic realism and poses a "closed" discourse—and does not "effectively sugges[t] that the situation in Northern Ireland should be resolved through negotiation rather than paramilitary tactics" (144). The comment itself bridges a yawning gap: it makes reference to Barton's analysis of Jordan's nostalgic treatment of Michael Collins himself, yet only tenuously connects that element of the film text to the immensely important but barely discussed question of the film's political ideology.

Barton's smorgasbord approach suggests tantalizing complexities yet fails to sustain an engagement with any one methodology. This seems to be a common feature in studies of Irish cinema. While Pettit's book defines itself as a cultural studies reader in film and television—and thus relieves itself of any obligation to perform close textual analysis—it also includes close readings that, at times, seem detached from thoroughly researched and well-written historical, economic, theoretical, and cultural analyses. McLoone, like Barton, limits his focus to Irish cinema and blends genre, cultural, historical and thematic analysis in chapters whose topics range from the pastoral romance to short films, from indigenous films of the 1970s to a reading of an individual film (Jordan's *The Butcher Boy)*. Still, McLoone's book emerges as the most coherent of the three because he lays out the salient features of the Irish cultural nationalist vision and commits to a consistent methodology. His richly contextual analyses trace recurring ideological tensions that helped to construct and also threaten a univocal Irish national identity.

It's tempting to ask whether there's something about the subject matter itself that resists methodological discipline. Does the contested history of competing claims to Irish national identity—including, most recently, revisionism—give rise to rhetorical entropy? The answer is no. The question itself recycles colonialist and nationalist notions vis-à-vis the "Irish question": for example, that Ireland must always be taken as a special case, as an indigestible other whose unique

history and culture are impossible for anyone (including Irish scholars) to address in a coherent fashion. The true culprits may be scholarly and publishing imperatives that make it difficult to publish "merely" an industry history or "just" a collection of culturally grounded close readings (or any of countless other approaches that yield coherence, even if they don't satisfy the current desire to do it all). There is a price to be paid for multitasking, whatever the reason for it. Sadly, Barton's book suffers from an inability to hew to the simplicity of its strongest insight: that Irish films have variously expressed, in culturally resonant and historically specific ways, the self-contradictory energies associated with revolution, nation state-ism, and postmodern culture.

MARIA PRAMAGGIORE is an associate professor and Director of the Film Studies program at North Carolina State University.

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Jean-Pierre Melville: An American in Paris

By Ginette Vincendeau. London: British Film Institute, 2003. $19.95. 278 pages.

Jean-Pierre Melville is a fascinating, nearly mythical figure in French cinema. However, his place in film history has been complicated by uneven critical responses, and many of us have too handily reduced him to a two-stage career: first, as precursor to the French New Wave; later, as a director of stylish, male-centered crime films. Ginette Vincendeau's book reinvigorates the analysis and historical debates regarding Melville's career and legacy. In the process she provides an admirable model for auteur study, one which investigates a number of industrial, stylistic, and thematic tendencies in Melville's 14 films, from his first short, *24 heures de la vie d'un clown* (1946), to his final feature, *Un Flic* (1972). Vincendeau is intrigued by Melville's complex, often contradictory traits. *Jean-Pierre Melville: An American in Paris* is in part built around her perceptive conception of Melville as someone often balancing himself precariously between contradictory poles, including both American and French intertextual influences, and his status as an eccentric, independent producer-director who turned out popular genre movies featuring top stars. The result is a fine study that succinctly covers Melville's career while lending great insight into key aspects of his stories and style.

Vincendeau clearly organizes her book around chapters that deal with several films clustered around common narrative and stylistic traits, and usually in chronological order. Initially, however, a brief introduction establishes "four approaches which reverberate" (4) throughout the book: Melville's film style and its contexts; his place in popular cinema, including adaptations of popular literature and use of stars; the national/transnational identity that complicates his place in French culture; and notions of gender and especially masculinity. Chapter 1, "From Film Lover to Film-maker: The Life and Career of Jean-Pierre Melville," traces the fascinating challenges of writing about Melville, whose life, according to Vincendeau, is "opocentric," or centered around his work. She acknowledges gaps and contradictions in some details about Melville's biography, but does not let the task of sorting out fact from fiction distract her project. For Vincendeau, Melville—with his fanatical cinephilia, participation in the Resistance, and fierce independence—is best understood via his filmmaking rather than through details from his private life. Some mystery always surrounds this isolated auteur and his "disturbing vision of masculinity that is bleakly sexist" (21).

The second chapter, "Stylistic Exercises: *24 heures de la vie d'un clown* (1946), *Les Enfants terribles* (1950), *Quand tu liras cette lettre* (1953)," is constructed around three movies that in some ways stand apart from the rest of his work. However, this chapter firmly establishes important themes for Melville's oeuvre, especially melancholy, nostalgia, and ambivalence. Vincendeau also sets up a structure that will organize each of the book's remaining chapters. She investigates conditions of production, critical reception, source material for adaptations, attention to visual style, and recurring ambiguities regarding gender. She is particularly good at acknowledging critical complaints against some aspects of Melville's films, but then finding moments of beauty and interesting facets overlooked by others. For instance, while André Bazin and François Truffaut attacked Melville's "grotesque" and "snobbish" melodrama, *Quand tu liras cette lettre,* Vincendeau asserts that "their polemic blinded them to some of this film's qualities" (41-42), including its heightened emotions, irony, and emphasis on female sexuality. She is also intrigued with the contradictions between touches of realism in Melville (location shooting and long takes) and self-conscious, even theatrical flourishes that increasingly mark his films as mannered and abstract. Here, as in the remaining chapters, her research has made excellent use of sources and the French film library, BIFI.

"Melville's War: *Le Silence de la mer* (1947-49), *Léon Morin, prêtre* (1961), *L'Armée des ombres* (1969)" covers three very different films from three different stages of Melville's career. Yet these movies are based on autobiographical books about the Resistance, adapted by Melville in ways that rework "the public 'myth' of the Resistance" (50). *Le Silence de la mer* was a legendary production wherein Melville adapted Vercors' famous novel, but had no permissions to produce the movie or to adapt the book. Yet the film was eventually released and became a huge hit. Vincendeau explains that Melville's personal experience with World War II, his call for a new film aesthetic, and the film's innovative style (including the famous voice-over and Henri Decaë's stunning cinematography) help account for its great success.

Her analysis of *Léon Morin* builds on Melville's shift toward genre filmmaking and his mix of New Wave style with a more mainstream, technically polished approach. While the movie features *Hiroshima, mon amour*'s star Emmanuelle Riva alongside Jean-Paul Belmondo, Vincendeau points out that Melville reduces the book's faith in women's power. In his film, female desire is frustrating and often linked to collaboration. By the time of *L'Armée des ombres,* just after May 1968, noble accounts of the Resistance generation were under attack and Melville's adaptation turns even more bleak and

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Chapter 4, "Between the New Wave and America: *Bob le flambeur* (1956), *Deux hommes dans Manhattan* (1959), *L'Ainé des Ferchaux* (1963)," brings together three loose crime dramas, or *policiers,* that form a transitional period in Melville's career. *Bob le flambeur* is evaluated for its cultural context, mixed critical reception, and differences from typical French "neo-noirs" of the 1950s. This film allows Vincendeau to elaborate many of her key points regarding Melville's themes and stylistic flourishes. In particular she highlights *Bob le flambeur*'s formation of a "male family," with its marginalization of women characters, "homophilic" undercurrents, and nostalgia for a pre-WWII, poetic-realist world ruled by tough men. *Deux hommes,* Melville's least successful film, is a dark detective drama: "Read across Melville's career, [*Deux hommes*] is a perfect mise-en-abyme of Melville's preoccupations. America, New Wave film-making, jazz, the crime genre are imbricated in its glittering surface—but embedded at the core is the myth of Resistance" (121). *L'Ainé des Ferchaux,* based on a Georges Simenon mystery, signaled a decisive decline in critical reactions to Melville in the early 1960s. By now, his polished genre films, featuring bigger named stars, were criticized as old guard "quality" movies at a time when "new" French cinema was breaking those conventions.

In Chapter 5, "Série Noire—Films Noirs: *Le Doulos* (1963) and *Le deuxième souffle* (1966)," Vincendeau proves that Melville manages to turn out faithful adaptations that remain self-reflexive. Both films offer "highly stylized reflections on complex literary and filmic Franco-American hybrids" (142). Vincendeau's portrait of Melville focuses increasingly on his balance of seemingly contradictory tendencies into new syntheses: his films combine French auteurism and American genre traits, look professional yet eccentric, and mix realism with abstraction. They are the products of vast cultural contexts and Melville's individual history. With *Le Doulos* and *Le deuxième souffle,* Vincendeau traces the way Melville's construction of archetypal gangsters reduced the novels' social dimensions, further marginalizing his women characters and mythologizing the tragic, lone male protagonists of film noir. As one more instance of Melville's intriguing hybridity, she argues that during this era of popular gangster pictures, he continues to fight Hollywood's dominance while he is nonetheless overtly influenced by its crime films.

Chapter 6, "The Delon Trilogy: *Le Samurai* (1967), *Le Cercle rouge* (1970), *Un Flic* (1972)," allows Vincendeau to pull together every strand of her intricate portrait. Here finally are the most consistently stylized films, distinguished by what she labels "baroque minimalism"—a cinema of process presenting actions in their full integrity, accompanied by silence for a poignant impression of duration and slowness. *Le Samurai* in particular produces "an opaque narrative world" in which the mise-en-scène and music provide more information than dialogue. It also displays a formal beauty that was soundly dismissed by many critics as vacuous (188). All three movies reinforce the ritualistic gestures of Alain Delon's melancholy gangsters. He displays the "arrogant detachment" of a dandy crossed with a warrior as Melville replaces violent action with self-conscious gestures and poses (184). According to Vincendeau, the samurai tradition of a lone professional is invoked to confer "credibility and prestige on an excessively masculine, death-driven form" (183). Melville's strange hybridity continues to unify Vincendeau's summary: "*Le Cercle rouge* is both a consummate distillation of the heist genre and a totally original take on it" (192). While *Un Flic,* "Melville's Troubled Swansong," proved popular with audiences but left critics disappointed, Vincendeau uses it to sum up the challenges of evaluating Melville, including his cynicism, homophilia, and excessive mannerism. Yet she points out Melville's simultaneous display and suspicion of modernity and ponders his popularity at the box office despite an emphasis on futility and death. For her, Melville retains some social value by demonstrating masculinity in crisis, with "a nostalgic glance at a world before female emancipation" (211). However, it is not clear whether all male buddy films tend toward homophilia for Vincendeau, or whether Melville is more problematic than other directors.

The conclusion, "Neither American nor French, but Melvillian," maps out the Melville traits Vincendeau has used to organize her inquiry. She considers him "the poet of male solitude and melancholy, of impossible love, of loyalty and betrayal" (217). Unfortunately, only the final paragraph mentions his significance for subsequent directors, including John Woo, Quentin Tarantino, and Luc Besson. A more developed account of the legacy of this intriguing individualist seems warranted. But Ginette Vincendeau clearly articulates and proves her central arguments, and evaluates large cultural contexts as well as details such as average shot lengths for her analyses. Rather than applying a narrow cultural studies or biographical or thematic framework, Vincendeau confronts a wide range of highly significant dimensions of Melville's work in a helpful historical format, motivating readers to return to the films and flesh out whichever angles interest them the most. This is a very well-written book, with a good filmography, valuable appendices, and high quality illustrations. Vincendeau's *Jean-Pierre Melville* is clearly the finest book on the director in any language.

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Theodore Dreiser interviewed Mack Sennett for *Photoplay* in 1928 and saw through the exuberant, anarchic façade of the King of Comedy: "For looking at him as he sat there—the

bulk and girth of him—I could see the constructive energy and will, the absolute instinct and force, which has led and permitted him to do so ably all that he has done. It was interesting just to feel the force and the intelligence of him, his willingness and determination to give a satisfactory account of himself" (cited in Louvish, 240). The evidence presented by Simon Louvish in *Keystone* confirms the validity of Dreiser's intuitive observation that Sennett was an intellect as well as a producer, director, actor, and studio executive. Michael Sinnott was born in 1880, of an Irish Catholic farming family in Quebec. Despite his humble upbringing, he attended one of the best Francophone institutions and was educated "to a level of schooling far above his class and patrimony"(8). Throughout his life, Sennett worked uncommonly hard to construct competing personalities that defined his public persona as a naïve and oafish fellow, and demarcated his private persona as . . . well, that is the question.

The public-private antinomy is the stuff of traditional biographies, and this is the case with *Keystone*. That Sennett was unusually successful in guarding the private domain creates a problem for Louvish, who has to push the edges of scholarship to fill in the blanks in his subject's life outside the office.

As were Louvish's previous books on W. C. Fields, the Marx Brothers, and Laurel and Hardy, this one is a good read. It's chock full of facts, fascinating anecdotes, and factoids ("Heroin, a brand name of the Bayer company, was introduced in 1898.") It does not dwell on such minutiae as studio financial reports or formal analysis or comparisons to the larger industrial context or the fragility of humor. But it does go out of its way to connect Sennett with other interesting people and events. It is film history with the boring bits left out.

It has elements of a "great man" biography in its attempt to construct a unified portrait of an influential figure. Louvish threads Kane-like irony through the work when he contrasts Sennett's lofty aspirations to build a palatial "Xanadu" where the Hollywood sign now stands with the sad, impecunious end that came in 1960. Louvish utilizes fan and motion-picture story magazines, but does not take into account the critical literature on these sources or reception studies in general. The book has elements of a studio history (for the studio context, Louvish relies on standard secondary sources) and incorporates documentation from the extensive Sennett archives at the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences Margaret Herrick Library. But often these are pasted in without discussing how they illuminate the inner workings of Sennett's studio. The book also has elements of a Hollywood exposé, relishing the tales of scandal that stirred Sennett's world without ever implicating him directly. Louvish reports the various rumors and innuendoes about Sennett's alleged homo- or bisexuality, but is circumspect, given the lack of any solid evidence.

The first two parts of *Keystone* present the formative years of Sennett in Canada and his nondescript career as a performer. Louvish was assisted by a professional genealogist and a local historian—resources that, while of evident value, are seldom utilized in film biographies. He also devotes considerable space to what would be called, in a dissertation defense, the "state of the question," that is, a discussion of his sources and a survey of the existing literature. This is unusual for a book aimed primarily at a readership of nonacademics. It also reveals that he hasn't done the donkey work that writing about silent cinema entails: slogging through microfilms of *Variety, Moving Picture World, Motography,* the New York *Dramatic Mirror, Film Daily* and the rest. (The references that do appear seem to refer to articles in library clipping files.) He also missed three relevant Ph.D. dissertations (from Emory in 2001, and Wayne State and Wisconsin-Madison, both in 1998). This is somewhat compensated for by his labors in the Sennett papers and the clipping files at the New York Public Library and the BFI. He seems unaware of the symposium on slapstick presented by the Museum of Modern Art or of the big Keystone retrospective at the silent film festival in Pordenone, which was accompanied by a catalogue. His film viewing sources are mostly public domain videos. However, Louvish's review of the deplorable state of scholarship in the readily available popular sources is admirable. He demonstrates how until very recently film historians were quite content to "print the legend." When Louvish passes on speculation or indulges in it himself, he clearly labels it as such.

One can overlook this lack of scholarly depth, perhaps, because Louvish's account of the competitive world of early filmmaking in New York, New Jersey, and Hollywood is vivid and generally factual. His description of the importance of the enormously popular Mabel Normand provides a glimpse into the star system in its earliest form, with its reliance on press agents and the ancestors of today's studio spinmeisters. (This evolution could have been charted almost daily in the trade pages.) Normand, an accomplished aviatrix, a neglected actor, and one of the earliest woman directors, is the first female comedy film star, and also the love interest—if that's the right term—in Louvish's story (he doubts that their romance was more than Platonic). Louvish suggestively refers to a "Jewish Keystone" genre, slapstick comedies characterized by ethnic mugging, which thrived in 1913 before fading away. What was the content? Who were the audiences for these films? How were they advertised? Did they play selective markets? What factors were responsible for their cessation? Perhaps these answers are lost in the fog of history, but it is worth a closer examination.

The Keystone Studio was an incubator of film talent. Sennett's roster included Charlie Chaplin, Fatty Arbuckle, Normand, Gloria Swanson, Harry Langdon, Chester Conklin, Ben Turpin, Louise Fazenda, and dozens of now-forgotten-but-then-beloved silent clowns. Future important directors, famously Frank Capra, used Keystone as their launch pad. By the late 20s, despite the competition from Hal Roach and (Sennett claimed) animated cartoons, the studio continued to dominate screen comedy, in quantity if not quality.

The third and fourth parts of the book are excurses that follow the careers of the more famous personalities associated with the studio, including Chaplin and W. C. Fields. Discussions of the Hollywood scandals of the early 20s, of the fates of Langdon and others, and of Normand's and Sennett's on-and-off love affair (complicated by the genealogist's turning

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An unexpected consequence of the book's focus on film performance as such is a shift (if not a return) to the vital role of the director in shaping performances. Sharon Carnicke's article, "Screen Performance and Directors' Visions," sets the tone for most of the more narrowly focused essays to follow. Carnicke, author of a major work on Stanislavsky, argues that to call actors either "Stanislavskian" or "Brechtian" misses the point, because "screen actors accommodate different directorial visions by adjusting their performances to suit the aesthetic and narrative styles of the films in which they appear." Jack Nicholson's divergent performances in Antonioni's *The Passenger* and Kubrick's *The Shining,* or Shelley Duvall's in *The Shining* and Altman's *Nashville,* provide telling examples. Putting aside the fact that Stanislavsky advocated just this sort of actorly flexibility as essential to the discipline, Carnicke adds much-needed complexity to the prevalent "twin pillars" mentality on the subject.

However, Carnicke's focus on this handful of iconoclastic European and independent directors, each of whose films is distinctive for their performances' conflicted relationship with realism, becomes a frustrating theme for the next half-dozen essays—"Acting in the films of" Bresson, Antonioni, Altman, Cassavetes, Sayles, and Jordan. Individually, most of these essays are commendable. Doug Tomlinson's study of Bresson's *A Man Escaped* takes issue with the interpretation of his blank-faced and -voiced actors as Kuleshovian constructions, arguing instead that Bresson believed in inexpressivity as the doorway to authenticity, that "the expression is not on the face, it is *in* the face." (Tomlinson's article is somewhat awkwardly excised from his dissertation on Bresson, Renoir and Hitchcock, with vestigial references to the other directors.) Robert T. Self compellingly analyzes the ways in which the zoom lens, radio mikes, fractured narrative, and *typage* help the actors in *Nashville* create 24 vivid performances. Yet together these articles pose an interesting question to the reader: Is further discussion of film performance best served by a book that often pays more attention to directors than actors? True, film performance is a collective enterprise; but the question grows especially troublesome with Carole Zucker's study of performance in Neil Jordan's films. Zucker writes in her introduction that Jordan "investigate[s] diverse styles of acting" and that "performances in his films have no discernible signature"—a stark contrast to the directors explored elsewhere. Given the disparate nature of the performances she examines, from *The Crying Game* to *Interview with the Vampire* to *The End of the Affair,* her only recourse is to end by emphasizing Jordan's common themes throughout. This kind of traditional auteur study, while valuable, hardly advances the study of film performance as such.

Happily, the final section on "postmodern" performance, perhaps freed from needing to think in terms of authors, delivers analyses more challenging to film studies' assumptions about film acting. Dennis Bingham's piece on Nicole Kidman and Tom Cruise in Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* stumbles at first when he inexplicably describes Cruise's style as that of a classical Everyman, "emoting much less than the other actors around him." However, Bingham proceeds to offer the most nuanced close readings in the collection, especially of Kidman's episodic acting, variously switched on or off depending on familial or societal demands on her character. Bingham gives the reader rare insight into the complexity of a great performance, while still acknowledging other influences on it. With similar results, Vivian Sobchack's "Thinking through Jim Carrey," the anthology's standout article, considers the "corporeal intelligence" of Carrey's comedic genius. Sobchack draws on the rhetorical "argument of unlimited development" to theorize Carrey's performative value, which is defined more by its hyperbolic process than its exaggerated content—a continual search for greater and greater physical extremes. Carrey's audience becomes complicit in the spectacular "argument" he performs bodily, but also rebuts its rhetoric, via laughter, through recognizing its ridiculousness as it reaches those extremes.

The implicit claim in both these essays that the performers in question are worthy of microanalysis (in Carrey's case, virtually demanding it) amply justifies the project of these new collections. The finest endorsement to be made for both these works is that they will provoke fresh discussion on the directions future studies in this burgeoning area should take.

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The New Brazilian Cinema

Edited by Lúcia Nagib. London: I.B. Tauris, in association with The Centre for Brazilian Studies, Oxford, 2003. $65.00 cloth; $26.95 paper. 296 pages.

During the last decade, Brazilian cinema has rebounded impressively from one of the worst crises of its history, brought about in large part by the withdrawal of government support under then president Fernando Collor de Mello in 1990. Feature films such as *Four Days in September* (Bruno Barreto, 1997), *Central Station* (Walter Salles Jr., 1998), *Me, You, Them* (Andrucha Waddington, 2000), *City of God* (Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund, 2002), and *Carandiru* (Hector Babenco, 2003) have attracted significant audiences and critical acclaim both at home and abroad, while a revitalized documentary movement has offered such vibrant and provocative works as *Bus 174* (José Padilha, 2002) and *Edifício Master* (Eduardo Coutinho, 2002).

In 1998, *Cinema Novo and Beyond* (New York: Museum of Modern Art), a collection of essays edited by João Luiz Vieira on the occasion of an important retrospective held at MOMA, offered an initial glimpse at some of Brazil's post-crisis production. Now *The New Brazilian Cinema* provides a more comprehensive critical survey of the films made in

what has become known as the *retomada,* or reemergence, of Brazilian cinema. Growing out of an academic conference held at the University of Oxford in 2000, the book contains16 essays written by some of the leading Brazilian, British, and American scholars and critics of the subject, including pieces by some who had active roles in the process of rebuilding the nation's cinema after the crisis of the early 1990s—notably José Álvaro Moisés, who served as the Ministry of Culture's National Secretary for Audiovisual Affairs in the late 1990s, filmmaker Carlos Diegues (*Orfeu* [1999]; *Deus É Brasileiro* [2003]), and critic José Carlos Avellar, who headed Rio de Janeiro's municipal film agency, Riofilme, throughout most of the 1990s.

The volume attempts to describe how Brazilian cinema emerged from the crisis of the early 1990s, as well as how it continues to face challenges; how it expresses—both politically and aesthetically—some of the current and historical dilemmas facing contemporary Brazil, and how it relates to the country's own cinematic and cultural traditions. Given the considerable aesthetic and ideological legacy of Cinema Novo, it is not surprising that the movement frequently serves as a point of comparison in the book's discussions of contemporary production.

Like most film industries around the world, Brazilian cinema depends on government support for its very survival. The volume's first two essays, by José Álvaro Moisés and Carlos Diegues, describe the changes in governmental film policy that enabled the national cinema to get back on its feet and point to some of the things that remain to be done (e.g., the expansion of exhibition outlets, the greater integration of film and television). Although informative and insightful, the essays give short shrift to two of the most important developments of the 1990s: the powerful Globo television network's creation of its own film production company—Globo Filmes (which is at least partially responsible for such films as *Orfeu, City of God,* and *Carandiru,* among numerous others)—and the fact that U.S. majors have become the most successful distributors of Brazilian films. Productions without the support of one or the other, or both, have little chance at success in the domestic market. Rather than definitive analyses, therefore, these essays are best seen as snapshots of a given moment of a process that was ongoing even in 2004, when sometimes heated debates continue to take place about the preferred model of state support and other issues affecting Brazilian film industry development.

Unlike the 1960s, when Cinema Novo burst upon the international scene with its uncompromising and politically engaged portraits of the country's underdevelopment, the new Brazilian cinema is not guided or constrained by grand political narratives. Although the social problems addressed since the 1960s have not been resolved, there is today no unifying movement, common cause, or hegemonic political discourse in Brazilian cinema, and film is no longer seen as a tool for consciousness-raising in a broader process of social transformation. Numerous commentators, including some of the contributors to this volume, have noted that in today's globalized world, Brazilian cinema may still be national, but it is no longer nationalistic, and that Cinema Novo's focus on the political has tended to be replaced by a predominant interest in the personal. At the same time, it would be simplistic, if not outright incorrect, to suggest that contemporary films no longer explore pressing social issues, even if they no longer do so within the same aesthetic and ideological frame as Cinema Novo.

Two of the book's six sections deal precisely with these questions. First, in the section titled "Fiction Film and Social Change," Ismail Xavier and Fernão Pessoa Ramos offer what might be called "symptomatic" analyses of certain tendencies of contemporary films that, in Xavier's words, "express genuine anxieties coming from the very texture of our everyday life" (62). In his essay, Xavier examines three features of plot or character development—the "unexpected encounter," the "resentful character," and the "figure of redemption"—that he sees as central motifs in a significant number of films, such as *Os Matadores* (Beto Brant, 1997), *Um Céu de Estrelas* (Tata Amaral, 1997), and *Central Station,* and which express a general malaise in society and a sense of personal or political failure.

Fernão Ramos, on the other hand, sees as one of the dominant characteristics of contemporary Brazilian cinema what he calls the "unviable nation." According to him, it is no longer a certain social class that is responsible for Brazil's social ills, as often seemed to be the case in the films of Cinema Novo; rather, the nation as a whole, with its incompetent and corrupt social institutions, is the villain. Ramos examines the unviable nation in films such as *Central Station, Midnight* (Walter Salles, 1999), *Orfeu,* and the appropriately titled *Cronicamente Inviável* (*Chronically Unfeasible,* Sérgio Bianchi, 2000), in which "representation of incompetence reaches absolute generality" (72). João Luiz Vieira closes the section with a more detailed analysis of Bianchi's film, which he refers to as a "political film in a depoliticized world."

In the section titled "*Sertão* and *favela*: The Eternal Return," three essays examine the ways in which contemporary films represent two of the favored scenarios of Cinema Novo: the *sertão,* or backlands, of Brazil's northeast, and urban slums or *favelas.* Setting Cinema Novo up as a model against which subsequent films are to be judged, Ivana Bentes argues that recent films such as *Guerra de Canudos* (Sérgio Rezende, 1997) and *Central Station* shift from "the 'aesthetics' to the 'cosmetics' of hunger" and transform Cinema Novo's "lands in crisis" into glamorized, exotic gardens where reconciliation replaces conflict. Films set in urban slums do not fare much better in her opinion, since films such as Diegues's *Orfeu* romanticize popular culture and seem to suggest that "the only way out . . . is through fame and popularity in the media" (136).

The next two essays focus on the two "territories" discussed by Bentes. The volume's organizer, Lúcia Nagib, looks at what she calls "recycled utopias," particularly in relation to Walter Salles's *Midnight,* a film that portrays a quite unexpected New Year's Eve encounter between a young middle-class woman and a man who has just gotten out of prison. Utopias seem impossible, however, as the film ends tragically

without providing answers to the questions raised. In a sense, Luiz Zanin Oricchio's essay, "The *sertão* in the Brazilian Imaginary at the End of the Millennium," is the most useful of the three for a non-Brazilian audience, for it offers both the necessary historical background and a nuanced critical survey of a number of key films. Oricchio, by the way, is the author of *Cinema de Novo: Um Balanço Crítico da Retomada* (São Paulo, 2003), the best comprehensive look at recent Brazilian cinema to be published to date.

The New Brazilian Cinema offers a range of additional perspectives on documentary filmmaking (particularly the work of Eduardo Coutinho), cinematic adaptations of literary works, and the musical comedy tradition. Particularly worthy of mention is Robert Stam's "Cabral and the Indians: Filmic Representations of Brazil's 500 Years," which complements the author's book, *Tropical Multiculturalism: A Comparative History of Race in Brazilian Cinema and Culture* (1997).

Although certainly a welcome addition to the English-language bibliography on Brazilian cinema, the book is not without its shortcomings. First—and through no fault of its organizer—it is not as comprehensive as one might like it to be. Although published in 2003, it only partially covers the period from 1994 until 2000. It does not refer, therefore, to such films as *Lavoura Arcaica* (Luiz Fernando de Carvalho), *Behind the Sun* (Walter Salles, Jr.), and *Bicho de Sete Cabeças* (Laís Bodansky), to cite only three films released in 2001. Given the time lag between submission and publication, the volume obviously could not have included discussions of later films such as *City of God, Madame Satan* (Karim Anöuiz), and *O Invasor* (Beto Brant), all of which were released in 2002. Second, one can only speculate about the absence of a filmmaker of the importance of Júlio Bressane, who released three feature films during the period under consideration, almost single-handedly keeping a vanguard spirit alive. Finally, the translations from Portuguese are uneven and are often either unwieldy or stilted.

RANDAL JOHNSON, who teaches at UCLA, is the author of *Cinema Novo x 5: Masters of Contemporary Brazilian Film*, *The Film Industry in Brazil: Culture and the State*, and *Antônio das Mortes*. He is co-editor, with Robert Stam, of *Brazilian Cinema*.

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Optical Poetry: The Life and Work of Oskar Fischinger

By William Moritz. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004. $65.00 cloth; $27.95 paper. 246 pages.

Who was an influence on Harry Smith, John Cage, Mary Ellen Bute, and John and James Whitney? Who created the first music video over 50 years before MTV? From amusing anecdotes to more substantive historical analysis, the surprising answer to these questions are found in William Moritz's new book *Optical Poetry,* on the life and work of Oskar Fischinger (1900-1967). A renowned filmmaker in his own right (with 34 experimental and animated films), as well as past president of the Society for Animation Studies, Moritz (1941-2004) was a preeminent animation curator and author of a number of earlier essays on Fischinger and his contemporaries. The culmination of more than 34 years of research with the Fischinger archive and his friendship with Fischinger's widow Elfriede, Moritz's *Optical Poetry* examines the life and work of a renowned Modernist animator and abstract painter. Maker of over 50 films, including *Kreise* (*Circles*, 1933), *Composition in Blue* (1935), and *Radio Dynamics* (1942), together with 800 paintings, Oskar Fischinger's experimental animation anticipated pop and psychedelic art, and even the music video, as his animated shorts, *Studies Numbers 2, 3, 4* and *5* (all 1930), promoted Electrola records that were synchronized with his films. Long before Warhol's multiple projection for *Chelsea Girls,* Fischinger's *R-1: A Form Play* was screened on five different projectors in Berlin in 1927. Trained as a draftsman, tool designer, and engineer, the astonishingly creative Fischinger also had mechanical talents: he was the inventor of the "wax machine" (which synchronized frame-by-frame photography with wax slices) and the Lumigraph (an instrument which played light images), and was known as the "Wizard of Friedrichstrasse" for his special effects in Fritz Lang's *Frau im Mond* (*Woman in the Moon,* 1929) and other UFA films.

Fischinger described his animation as "absolute" or "concrete," terms he preferred to "abstract," as the latter sometimes implied a connection (however tangential) to something representational as a source for his visuals. Fischinger also briefly worked on *Pinocchio* (animating the Blue Fairy's wand), and the Toccata and Fugue section of Walt Disney's *Fantasia* from 1938 till 1939, when, disgusted with the conservative and hierarchical nature of the Disney studio, he quit, protesting that "The film is not really my work. Rather, it is the most inartistic product of a factory. . . . One thing I definitely found out: that no true work of art can be made with that procedure used in the Disney studio."

A stunning work of scholarship and biographical information, *Optical Poetry* takes its title from Fischinger's belief that animation was a true art form because of its synesthetic capacity to make "optical poetry," "musographics," "eye-music," and "ornament-dance." It draws out the surprising influences that Fischinger's work had for the American avant-garde, not only in animation but also in painting and sound. Moritz points to Fischinger's conceptual breakthrough in 1932, to the effect that the abstract designs or "ornaments" he used in his films were very similar to the graphic patterns of sound on the optical soundtrack. Fischinger gave lectures on this insight and his experiments on "Ornament Ton" (Ornament Sound) to the London Film Society and the Bauhaus, and also discussed his experiments with John Cage and Edgard Varèse, who, inspired by these insights, would go on to incorporate natural noise and silence into their musical compositions. Similarly, when screened in New York, Fischinger's films influenced future abstract expressionists such as Jackson Pollock. As one of its appendices, the book contains many testimonials from artists such as Cage, Lotte Reiniger,

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Jules Engel, Len Lye, and others on the conceptual and visual influence Fischinger's work would have in their own careers.

As this is the first book-length scholarly treatment of Oskar Fischinger's life and work, it fills a vacuum in the history of the avant-garde, and complements Moritz's earlier important study of Fischinger's work in a lengthy essay which first appeared in 1974 in *Film Culture* (nos. 58-60) and which proclaimed Fischinger to be the first underground filmmaker. Moritz's book joins a growing field of recent books on non-traditional or experimental animation, including Roger Horrock's *Len Lye* (Auckland, N.Z.: Auckland University Press, 2001); Peter Hames' anthology *Dark Alchemy: The Films of Jan Svankmajer* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995); Esther Leslie's *Hollywood Flatlands; Animation, Critical Theory and the Avant-garde* (London: Verso, 2002), and Jayne Pilling's collection of essays in *A Reader in Animation Studies* (London: John Libbey, 1997), which includes four articles by Moritz on Hans Fischerkoesen, Bertold Bartosch, Norman McLaren, and Jules Engel.

Optical Poetry is organized into six chronological chapters tracing Fischinger's early life in Gelnhausen, Germany; his relationship with his wife, fellow artist Elfriede; and his artistic career as he moved from Munich to Berlin to Hollywood. Moritz shows how Fischinger's experiments in abstract art made him no friends with the Nazi party, which condemned all Modernism as degenerate art. His political and personal affiliations also played a role in his decision to flee to the United States in 1936 (Fischinger had worked for the Socialist Democratic Party, or SPD, and had also collaborated with a number of Jewish and "half-Jewish" artists including Fritz Lang, Billy Wilder, and Mischa Spoliansky). The first four chapters (on Berlin, Nazi Terror, Hollywood, Disney and Guggenheim) follow a chronological survey of Fischinger's life as he moves from the German avant-garde to an increasingly marginalized period as a refugee in the United States, working on brief projects at Paramount, MGM, and Disney. But after Fischinger completed one of his greatest pieces, *Motion Picture no. 1,* in 1947, he had difficulty in obtaining film work; this led him to shift back from animation to painting, and the final two chapters of *Optical Poetry* offer an important assessment of much of this work.

Invaluable to the film scholar, the book contains extensive appendices, including a filmography with detailed synopses of each film, as well as a list of sources for renting Fischinger's work—a perennial problem for teachers of avant-garde material. There is an extensive bibliography of works both by and on Fischinger, including writings in non-English sources, as well as aesthetic manifestos by Fischinger, many of them previously unavailable, including his "My Statements Are in My Work" (1947), in which he explains the genesis of his work. Drawn from the Fischinger archives established by Elfriede and Moritz, there are also 160 beautiful illustrations of publicity stills, sketches, posters, and drawings, as well as frame grabs from Fischinger's film work from the 20s to the 60s. These illustrations are of stunning visual quality, and many are images from films that are difficult to obtain, fragmentary, or lost. Unfortunately, *Optical Poetry* lacks a text index and I hope that Indiana University Press will add one in future editions of this book. Aside from this minor flaw, the book is an important addition to animation scholarship and the history of the avant-garde, and a fitting tribute to Moritz's own passionate dedication to Fischinger's career.

DR. KIRSTEN MOANA THOMPSON is an assistant professor of Film Studies in the Department of English at Wayne State University and the co-editor, with Terri Ginsberg, of *Perspectives on German Cinema.*

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The Red and the Blacklist: The Intimate Memoir of a Hollywood Expatriate

Norma Barzman. New York: The Nation Books, 2003. $16.95. 468 pages.

Norma Barzman's *The Red and the Blacklist: The Intimate Memoir of a Hollywood Expatriate* stands out among the recent spate of blacklist memoirs for the way she combines the now familiar narrative of leftwing political and creative engagement in Hollywood during the 1930s and 1940s, followed by repression, blacklist and exile in the postwar years, with the story of her volatile partnership—political, creative, and romantic—with her husband, playwright and screenwriter Ben Barzman. Drawing on her own keen memory and Ben's detailed journals, Barzman insightfully captures not only their lives on the blacklist but also the issues and struggles of a generation of women who came of age in the "doldrums" between the first and second waves of American feminism.

Norma arrived in Hollywood in 1942 at the age of 21, intent on becoming a screenwriter. In the opening scene, at a star-studded Halloween party at the home of left-wing director Robert Rossen, she meets Ben Barzman, another up-and-coming writer. Their battle-of-the-sexes repartee establishes Norma as bright, talented, political, and feisty—a classic 30s wisecracking dame—and Ben as a talented, arrogant charmer and classic chauvinist pig who smirks at Norma's creative aspirations. This first romantic encounter ends, screwball comedy-style, with Norma throwing a lemon meringue pie in Ben's face. They were married several months later, and the sparks continued to fly between them until Ben's death in 1989.

During the war years, writing such politically infused films as *Back to Bataan* and *The Boy with Green Hair,* Ben became part of the group of progressive filmworkers at RKO that included producer Adrian Scott and director Edward Dmytryk, both future Hollywood Ten members. Norma, on the other hand, struggled to be taken seriously as a journalist and screenwriter while juggling her growing responsibilities as a wife and mother (the Barzmans eventually had seven children). She quickly earned a promotion to feature writer at the *Los Angeles Examiner,* but Hollywood proved a tougher nut for a woman writer to crack. Though she did sell two original stories—*Never Say Goodbye* and *The Locket*—to the studios, her efforts were often undercut, not only by sexist agents and producers but also by her husband, who resented and sometimes sabotaged her work outside the home.

Jules Engel, Len Lye, and others on the conceptual and visual influence Fischinger's work would have in their own careers.

As this is the first book-length scholarly treatment of Oskar Fischinger's life and work, it fills a vacuum in the history of the avant-garde, and complements Moritz's earlier important study of Fischinger's work in a lengthy essay which first appeared in 1974 in *Film Culture* (nos. 58-60) and which proclaimed Fischinger to be the first underground filmmaker. Moritz's book joins a growing field of recent books on non-traditional or experimental animation, including Roger Horrock's *Len Lye* (Auckland, N.Z.: Auckland University Press, 2001); Peter Hames' anthology *Dark Alchemy: The Films of Jan Svankmajer* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995); Esther Leslie's *Hollywood Flatlands; Animation, Critical Theory and the Avant-garde* (London: Verso, 2002), and Jayne Pilling's collection of essays in *A Reader in Animation Studies* (London: John Libbey, 1997), which includes four articles by Moritz on Hans Fischerkoesen, Bertold Bartosch, Norman McLaren, and Jules Engel.

Optical Poetry is organized into six chronological chapters tracing Fischinger's early life in Gelnhausen, Germany; his relationship with his wife, fellow artist Elfriede; and his artistic career as he moved from Munich to Berlin to Hollywood. Moritz shows how Fischinger's experiments in abstract art made him no friends with the Nazi party, which condemned all Modernism as degenerate art. His political and personal affiliations also played a role in his decision to flee to the United States in 1936 (Fischinger had worked for the Socialist Democratic Party, or SPD, and had also collaborated with a number of Jewish and "half-Jewish" artists including Fritz Lang, Billy Wilder, and Mischa Spoliansky). The first four chapters (on Berlin, Nazi Terror, Hollywood, Disney and Guggenheim) follow a chronological survey of Fischinger's life as he moves from the German avant-garde to an increasingly marginalized period as a refugee in the United States, working on brief projects at Paramount, MGM, and Disney. But after Fischinger completed one of his greatest pieces, *Motion Picture no. 1,* in 1947, he had difficulty in obtaining film work; this led him to shift back from animation to painting, and the final two chapters of *Optical Poetry* offer an important assessment of much of this work.

Invaluable to the film scholar, the book contains extensive appendices, including a filmography with detailed synopses of each film, as well as a list of sources for renting Fischinger's work—a perennial problem for teachers of avant-garde material. There is an extensive bibliography of works both by and on Fischinger, including writings in non-English sources, as well as aesthetic manifestos by Fischinger, many of them previously unavailable, including his "My Statements Are in My Work" (1947), in which he explains the genesis of his work. Drawn from the Fischinger archives established by Elfriede and Moritz, there are also 160 beautiful illustrations of publicity stills, sketches, posters, and drawings, as well as frame grabs from Fischinger's film work from the 20s to the 60s. These illustrations are of stunning visual quality, and many are images from films that are difficult to obtain, fragmentary, or lost. Unfortunately, *Optical Poetry* lacks a text index and I hope that Indiana University Press will add one in future editions of this book. Aside from this minor flaw, the book is an important addition to animation scholarship and the history of the avant-garde, and a fitting tribute to Moritz's own passionate dedication to Fischinger's career.

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The Red and the Blacklist: The Intimate Memoir of a Hollywood Expatriate

Norma Barzman. New York: The Nation Books, 2003. $16.95. 468 pages.

Norma Barzman's *The Red and the Blacklist: The Intimate Memoir of a Hollywood Expatriate* stands out among the recent spate of blacklist memoirs for the way she combines the now familiar narrative of leftwing political and creative engagement in Hollywood during the 1930s and 1940s, followed by repression, blacklist and exile in the postwar years, with the story of her volatile partnership—political, creative, and romantic—with her husband, playwright and screenwriter Ben Barzman. Drawing on her own keen memory and Ben's detailed journals, Barzman insightfully captures not only their lives on the blacklist but also the issues and struggles of a generation of women who came of age in the "doldrums" between the first and second waves of American feminism.

Norma arrived in Hollywood in 1942 at the age of 21, intent on becoming a screenwriter. In the opening scene, at a star-studded Halloween party at the home of left-wing director Robert Rossen, she meets Ben Barzman, another up-and-coming writer. Their battle-of-the-sexes repartee establishes Norma as bright, talented, political, and feisty—a classic 30s wisecracking dame—and Ben as a talented, arrogant charmer and classic chauvinist pig who smirks at Norma's creative aspirations. This first romantic encounter ends, screwball comedy-style, with Norma throwing a lemon meringue pie in Ben's face. They were married several months later, and the sparks continued to fly between them until Ben's death in 1989.

During the war years, writing such politically infused films as *Back to Bataan* and *The Boy with Green Hair,* Ben became part of the group of progressive filmworkers at RKO that included producer Adrian Scott and director Edward Dmytryk, both future Hollywood Ten members. Norma, on the other hand, struggled to be taken seriously as a journalist and screenwriter while juggling her growing responsibilities as a wife and mother (the Barzmans eventually had seven children). She quickly earned a promotion to feature writer at the *Los Angeles Examiner,* but Hollywood proved a tougher nut for a woman writer to crack. Though she did sell two original stories—*Never Say Goodbye* and *The Locket*—to the studios, her efforts were often undercut, not only by sexist agents and producers but also by her husband, who resented and sometimes sabotaged her work outside the home.

In 1949, although Ben was still under contract at RKO, the Barzmans left Hollywood, acquiescing to Dmytryk's plea that Ben come to London to write the screenplay adaptation of Pietro di Donato's novel *Christ in Concrete* (released as *Give Us This Day*), which was Dmytryk's last film before returning to the States to serve a six-month jail sentence for contempt of Congress. Ironically, in 1951, at the same time that *Give Us This Day* swept the top awards at a Czech film festival and the film's creators were feted for their resistance to the blacklist, Dmytryk had decided to testify as a friendly witness before HUAC, naming dozens of names in order to regain his Hollywood directing career. Norma and Ben Barzman were among those he identified as Communists, making their blacklisting official and their return to Hollywood unthinkable.

Barzman's account of their two-decade political exile in France is utterly engaging, told with both pathos and humor. In the early years, with their passports confiscated and facing the daily threat of deportation, the Barzmans struggled to integrate themselves into a foreign culture and to reestablish their truncated careers. Barzman recounts numerous tales of Byzantine negotiations with shady producers, third-rate projects undertaken strictly for the money, and deals that collapsed in the face of the blacklist. Despite the early difficulties, these were ultimately exciting and productive years for the Barzmans, as they and other blacklisted Americans in Paris participated in the international film industry's postwar challenge to Hollywood's long cultural hegemony. Working and socializing with the likes of Sophia Loren, Pablo Picasso, Konstantinos Costa-Gavras, Harold Robbins, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Simone de Beauvoir, as well as such notable Hollywood expatriates as Joseph Losey and Jules Dassin, the Barzmans eventually became quite successful despite the blacklist, writing both separately and together on such films as *Finishing School, Stranger on the Prowl, He Who Must Die, Z, El Cid, The Heroes of Telemark,* and many others.

Nonetheless, Ben's creative work clearly took precedence, and Norma was often relegated to the unpaid role of "researcher" in their many collaborative projects. Years later, agent John Weber, who had formed a short-lived independent production company in the 1950s with Ben and director Bernie Vorhaus, confirmed Norma's sense of gender discrimination: "You were conned. . . . We were all good friends. You were treated as a good friend but not an equal. You were a woman. . . . It's hilarious . . . because it shows how sexist three guys who thought they were decent and moral could be."

Ironically, perhaps, their tenuous situation as political exiles actually helped keep the Barzmans' marriage afloat. Norma writes movingly of her determination that the vagaries of the blacklist would not destroy their family and of their mutual sense of themselves as a *radical* couple, for whom shared political commitment overrode the myriad difficulties and betrayals of their personal lives. Nevertheless, her anger, nurtured over many years, left her depressed and unable to write for much of the 1960s. Barzman was clearly suffering from a classic case of Betty Friedan's "problem with no name," but she was not "saved" by the feminist movement (though she did support its goals and wrote a big check to the fledgling National Organization for Women). Instead, it was the uprising of French students and workers in May of 1968 that awakened her from "a twenty-year stupor," revitalizing both her political consciousness and her commitment to herself as a creative person.

Though the saga of the Barzmans' conflicted marriage makes this memoir an absolute page-turner, perhaps the most compelling contribution of *The Red and the Blacklist* is how it reveals the way in which politics and creativity fueled each other and how the Barzmans, despite the limitations and challenges of working under the blacklist, continued to try to infuse their creative work with their progressive political vision. In the end, Barzman remains an unrepentant radical—and one helluva writer.

JENNIFER LANGDON-TECLAW's dissertation on the cultural work of Adrian Scott, a 2004 recipient of the American Historical Association's Gutenberg-e Prize, will be digitally published in 2007 by Columbia University Press.

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Rethinking Media Change: The Aesthetics of Transition

Edited by David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003. $39.95. 414 pages.

In season two of "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," a second slayer named Kendra appears. Kendra knows that assassins are stalking Buffy from reading volume six of the writings of Dramius. The librarian Giles, clearly impressed, asks Kendra to show him the salient passages, confessing, "I seem to have never been able to get through that book. It was a bit stodgy." "It was difficult," Kendra acknowledges, "all those footnotes!" Giles and Kendra laugh, and the non-bookish Buffy complains, "Hello, and welcome to planet-pocket-protector."

One reason that "Buffy" appeals to so many academics is that it validates the planet-pocket-protector we inhabit. "Buffy" presents a world where people excitedly search books for passages that will literally save the world. Nerd-dom has never been so validated by mass culture. Despite our bookish existence, though, most media studies scholars know surprisingly little about the history of these objects that we read, collect, sort, lend, borrow, and xerox. For the most part, scholars of film, television, and new media limit our research to the past 100 years, and many don't go back more than 50 years. David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins's edited collection should help shake up the historical paradigms that media studies researchers have created, forcing us to look backwards at the history of the book and forward to the book's possible electronic transformations.

Rethinking Media Change is divided into three sections, and much of the first section focuses on the history of print. In "Books Are Dead, Long Live Books," Priscilla Coit Murphy surveys a hundred years of "premature obituaries for the bound book." With the invention of the phonograph in the late nineteenth century, enthusiasts anticipated the arrival of

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audio books: libraries would become "phonographotecks." In the 1950s, the American Library Association and the American Booksellers Association feared that television would permanently destroy people's reading habits. The reality, of course, is that books and a variety of audiovisual technologies have managed to peacefully coexist, and corporations have exploited tastes for a variety of media experiences, including the book experience. Murphy paints a nuanced picture of ideas about reading, a far cry from the panic of Neil Postman, Marie Winn, and, of course, the National Endowment for the Humanities, which in 2004 heatedly announced the precipitous decline in the reading of fiction and poetry. Non-fiction reading is doing quite well in the U.S., however, and the bookselling business remains brisk.

The classicist Gregory Crane also offers an antidote to alarmism over the death of the book. Instead of comparing the book to the computer screen as the anti-screen folks often do, Crane compares it to the scroll. It was the bound book, not hypertext, that first enabled a nonlinear reading experience and random access to text. Scrolls, conversely, allowed only linear reading. Crane is excited that the Web provides easy access to an enormous range of materials for the study of classics, accessible to postgraduate classics majors who, Crane optimistically hopes, will remain interested in their studies throughout their lives.

A number of essays in section one discuss print culture in relationship to oral culture, but the discussion comes to a head in Daniel Thorburn's "Prophetic Peasants and Bourgeois Pamphleteers: The Camisards Represented in Print, 1685-1710." Thorburn discusses "the coexistence of older forms of oral culture and newer forms of printed discourse over 250 years after the advent of the printing press." The poor and illiterate Camisard peasants of the early eighteenth century who attacked Louis XIV were popular in part because their proclamations were spoken; the written word was still mistrusted. When scribes transcribed Camisard speech they were glorifying the oral, not print, and the educated classes felt threatened by these powerful oral expressions (which they accessed through print). One could not ask for a better historical example of the persistent coexistence of old and new media.

The second section of the book turns to recent electronic media. William J. Mitchell discusses his 1995 on-line publication "City of Bits" in a reprint of a 1996 essay available on the City of Bits website. The essay is symptomatic of how quickly we have become accustomed to (and even bored with, for that's what happens when "new technologies" become mundane) reading text on the Web. Mitchell explains, for example, that there are hot links imbedded in his text, offering access to additional information, still a novelty perhaps in 1995. He concludes by saying that he regards "City of Bits" "as a kind of extended live performance in a vast virtual theater. Eventually, that performance will end. The site that remains will not instantly disappear, but will slowly fade away like an abandoned stage set—as link-rot sets in and as additions and updates are no longer made" (215). A quick visit to the site and a few clicks on dead-end links confirms that this is exactly what has happened.

In "Forms of Future," electronic novelist Michael Joyce declares that electronic literature will bring about "a new human clarity." Would that his own essay were an example of this vaunted human clarity. Multiple references to Berlin and Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *Wrapped Reichstag* mystified this reader, and grand statements like "the new electronic literature will bear the burden of possibilities in the way the earth bears the air" were provocative, but not altogether convincing. Joyce dislikes television, declaring that he puts his trust in words. But he is also taken with Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire*, and his beef is not really with images but with dumb images—"television imprinted on your eyeballs." That many fans of TV shows like "Xena Warrior Princess," "Star Trek: Voyager," and "X-Files" write fiction and produce their own videos (as discussed in Sharon Cumberland's "Private Uses of Cyberspace: Women, Desire and Fan Culture") illustrates the powerful meanings viewers can take from mass culture. These passionate and prolific writers also put their trust in words—words in collaboration with images.

Shelley Jackson's "Stitch Bitch: The Patchwork Girl" argues that "a plot is designed to keep you reading the next thing until the end, but hypertext invites choice." She attacks "the compulsion to find out what happens next . . . a not entirely pleasant compulsion disguised as entertainment, like being forced to dance by a magic fiddle." Plot, she contends, "chaperones understanding, cuts off errant interpretations," and leaves readers "stuck on one meaning like a bug on a pin," yet her own essay pulled me forward like the very "greased-lightning luge-novels" she disparages. Perhaps the essay was compelling, in part, because even if I was not convinced of the liberating potential of hypertext, I saw Jackson's passion for the avant-garde as parallel to my own passion for films with nonconventional plotting.

Some film studies scholars will no doubt be disappointed that this book does not pay more attention to cinema. The final (and shortest) section on visual culture discusses cinema as a technology: Alison Griffith's essay surveys historical debates over curators' attempts to balance "science and spectacle"; Constance Balides discusses the "immersion effect" of contemporary "movie ride" films like *Hackers* and *The Game*; and Anne Friedberg offers a brief but compelling historical overview of "The Virtual Window," discussing the frames of architectural windows, photography, cinema, television, and computers. Angela Ndalianis discusses multimedia theme-park attractions as well as the construction of space in films such as *Contact* and *Event Horizon*. While some theorists of new media might find a digital zoom-out into infinite space to have interesting implications ("'a' center is no longer present," Ndalianis argues), this is not the kind of observation that will make most readers rush to view these otherwise uninspiring films.

To play devil's advocate, one might argue that if you love cinema, you won't love this book. But that would be to miss the point. To love cinema is often to love aesthetic innovation, but "the aesthetics of transition," the book's subtitle, refers not so much to the aesthetics of media texts as to how the culture represents technological changes. Though some film professors may be tempted to stick to teaching auteurism

and watching Criterion DVDs in the safety of their homes, the rise of digital technology (e.g., Criterion DVDs) and the proliferation of new media will not be stalled by scholarly indifference.

Film scholars resistant to exploring the changes brought by new media should snap out of it when they read Henry Jenkins' "*Quentin Tarantino's Star Wars*? Digital Cinema, Media Convergence, and Participatory Culture." Jenkins examines both the tremendous potential that the Web offers for distribution of independent videos as well as the corporate roadblocks that get in the way. While fully aware of the political economy of media convergence, horizontal integration, etc., Jenkins argues that *Star Wars,* "Xena," and "Star Trek," which have inspired hundreds of short, cheap, digital webfilms, are the foundation of the new folk culture. Fans respond to the "situation of an increasingly privatized culture by applying the traditional practices of folk culture to mass culture, treating film or television as if it offered them raw materials for telling their own stories." Jenkins shows how corporations and directors such as George Lucas count on fans for free publicity and praise their films when it pleases them to do so—even incorporating fan aesthetics into their own trailers—but also call their lawyers at the drop of a hat if they find any aspect of fan culture threatening. At a time when Fair Use is increasingly under attack, and many universities are so scared of lawsuits that they pretend that it no longer exists, Jenkins shows how the free circulation of characters and narratives results in clever artistic works, in the spirit of what the founders of copyright law had in mind when they reasoned that (contrary to what Disney may claim) copyright should expire and ideas should circulate freely.

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Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema

Edited by Ivone Margulies. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002. $64.95 cloth; $21.95 paper. 347 pages.

This collection does three remarkable things. First, it offers a welcome rereading of André Bazin; second, it gathers contributors who regard human bodies not as mere representations on film, but as actual pro-filmic bodies, witnessed in their vulnerability; and lastly—and more diffusely—it attempts to show how the Bazinian legacy is intertwined with "corporeal cinema."

Over the last decade, film thinkers have tried broadening the scope of the high theory moment that was dominated by semiotic/structural approaches. Whether framed by cultural studies (Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz's collection *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* [1995]), cognitive neo-formalism (David Bordwell and Noël Carrol's edited *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* [1996]), or critical gender theory (*Reinventing Film Studies* [2000], edited by Linda Williams and Christine Gledhill), film theory is constantly being remapped. Cinematic realism, as redefined by *Rites of Realism,* emerges as another promising framework for this process.

Out of the 14 essays collected here, half were already published, the earliest in 1958, although three were untranslated; the other seven are new. The films analyzed include Lumière shorts, Dreyer's *Joan of Arc,* Buñuel's *Los Hurdes,* and Zhang Nuanxin's 1990 *Good Morning, Beijing,* suggesting that corporeal cinema is a practice as old and international as cinema itself. *Rites of Realism* proposes that corporeal cinema's pervasiveness and adaptability form a "methodological variant" (18) to concept-driven film theories. In her introduction, Ivone Margulies submits that film realism has been demystified before having been properly explained. The crux of her argument is that rituals, performances, and other "profilmic operations" (8), especially in "referential [film] genres and topics particularly prone to bodily discomfort" (5) constitute realism and redefine it. This bold move allows Margulies to resituate body criticism on the terrain of indexicality and referentiality, and sets the collection apart from other recent contributions in corporeal film criticism, such as Laura U. Marks' *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (2000), which focuses on haptics.

The collection is divided into three parts around Bazin, culturally specific realities, and film reenactment. Essays by Bazin ("Death Every Afternoon"), Serge Daney, Philip Rosen, and Mary Ann Doane comprise the first part: "Bazinian Contingencies." Bazin's famous dictum, "On the screen, the toreador dies every afternoon" (31), is the thread that runs through all four essays. Bazin argues that filmic repetition reinforces the aura of reality rather than weakening it, and that reproduction need not trivialize the moment of death. Daney's "The Screen of Fantasy (Bazin and Animals)," points out that the essential dimension of Bazin's bent for realism is not doctrinal transparence but the voyeuristic obsession for replay; his obsessive realism springs from the non-narrative dimensions of cinema, its "logic of permutation and vicariousness" (38) at cross-purposes with the "teleological coup" (39) of the plot. In "History of Image, Image of History: Subject and Ontology in Bazin," Rosen methodically unpacks the crux of Daney's reading of Bazin, namely that "a subjective investment in the image" (46) always undercuts the claims of objectivity of realism. Doane's essay extrapolates from there by reflecting on the theoretical consequences for cinema studies of attending to modernity's "project of making the contingent legible" (87).

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Out of the 14 essays collected here, half were already published, the earliest in 1958, although three were untranslated; the other seven are new. The films analyzed include Lumière shorts, Dreyer's *Joan of Arc,* Buñuel's *Los Hurdes,* and Zhang Nuanxin's 1990 *Good Morning, Beijing,* suggesting that corporeal cinema is a practice as old and international as cinema itself. *Rites of Realism* proposes that corporeal cinema's pervasiveness and adaptability form a "methodological variant" (18) to concept-driven film theories. In her introduction, Ivone Margulies submits that film realism has been demystified before having been properly explained. The crux of her argument is that rituals, performances, and other "profilmic operations" (8), especially in "referential [film] genres and topics particularly prone to bodily discomfort" (5) constitute realism and redefine it. This bold move allows Margulies to resituate body criticism on the terrain of indexicality and referentiality, and sets the collection apart from other recent contributions in corporeal film criticism, such as Laura U. Marks' *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (2000), which focuses on haptics.

The collection is divided into three parts around Bazin, culturally specific realities, and film reenactment. Essays by Bazin ("Death Every Afternoon"), Serge Daney, Philip Rosen, and Mary Ann Doane comprise the first part: "Bazinian Contingencies." Bazin's famous dictum, "On the screen, the toreador dies every afternoon" (31), is the thread that runs through all four essays. Bazin argues that filmic repetition reinforces the aura of reality rather than weakening it, and that reproduction need not trivialize the moment of death. Daney's "The Screen of Fantasy (Bazin and Animals)," points out that the essential dimension of Bazin's bent for realism is not doctrinal transparence but the voyeuristic obsession for replay; his obsessive realism springs from the non-narrative dimensions of cinema, its "logic of permutation and vicariousness" (38) at cross-purposes with the "teleological coup" (39) of the plot. In "History of Image, Image of History: Subject and Ontology in Bazin," Rosen methodically unpacks the crux of Daney's reading of Bazin, namely that "a subjective investment in the image" (46) always undercuts the claims of objectivity of realism. Doane's essay extrapolates from there by reflecting on the theoretical consequences for cinema studies of attending to modernity's "project of making the contingent legible" (87).

The second and third parts of the collection act as counterpoints to this exchange. In Part Two, "Cultural Indices," Paul Arthur examines "the intrinsic friction in film portraiture between realist and modernist aesthetic prerogatives" (113) among avant-garde and documentary filmmakers of the 1960s such as Mekas, Kroiter, Reichman, Pennebaker, Brakhage, and Warhol. Xiaobing Tang analyzes the rise of urban realism as a multifaceted aesthetics (of anxiety, social criticism, libidinal energy, etc.) between the Fourth and Fifth generations of Chinese filmmakers. In "Private Reality: Hara Kazuo's Films," Abé Mark Nornes reviews the career of the iconoclast documentarian who filmed the socially unfilmable: disabled bodies, sexual acts, elderly Japanese soldiers confronted with their World War II cannibalism in New Guinea. Richard Porton and James F. Lastra, in studies on Mike Leigh's films and Buñuel's *Las Hurdes (Land Without Bread)* respectively, explore how realism participates in the contest of modernism vs. cultural identity.

Margulies' more risky yet ultimately successful theoretical gambit concerns reenactment, the theme of the third part, "Retracings." Carefully distinguishing the exemplum (emulation) from the mere example (illustration), her essay, "Exemplary Bodies: Reenactment in *Love in the City, Sons,* and *Close-Up*," demonstrates how reenactment implicates realism. Noa Steimatsky on Pasolini, Catherine Russell on Maya Deren, Brigitte Peucker on Wenders and Greenaway, and James Schamus on Dreyer all invoke reenactment via other media as directly engaging the question of film realism. For instance, Deren's filming of Voodoo rituals comprised a participatory dimension that Russell sees as having prevented Deren from ever editing her footage into a feature. Peucker similarly argues that partial reenactment of Vermeer paintings by Wenders and Greenaway serves to make Vermeer into an uncanny proto-filmmaker of pure-light realism.

Although Peucker briefly mentions that the tableau vivant is an ideal set-up for pornographic representations, pornography is almost completely absent from this collection on "corporeal cinema." Bazin's and Daney's engagement with pornography or even sex on film would have been worth the inquiry, all the more so in that they invoke "rape" (for Bazin) and "the hymen" (for Daney) (35) to describe their obsession with realism. We could also wish that essays on disability (only briefly considered by Nornes), torture, genocide, and war had been included, since all imply extreme bodily vulnerability. But such wishes indicate only that corporeal performative realism has the potential to become a very capacious theoretical construct. *Rites of Realism* succeeds in its aim: to give shape to a very important new avenue for film criticism.

CHRISTOPHE WALL-ROMANA is an assistant professor in the Department of French and Italian at the University of Minnesota. His research concerns cinema's role as a compositional and imaginary apparatus in French writing, especially poetry.

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Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes, and Global Culture

By Charles R. Acland. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003. $79.95 cloth; $22.95 paper. 320 pages.

What's there to say about the much-maligned or taken-for-granted megaplex? Plenty, Charles R. Acland proves in *Screen Traffic,* a challenging, meticulously researched, theoretically engaged, convincingly argued book. Acland foregoes the examination of film texts or issues related to production, and, somewhat surprisingly, he doesn't devote much space to the various non-theatrical sites and platforms now available—home video and DVD, satellite and cable, and, perhaps most revolutionary, the Internet. But this narrowed focus on the theatrical is more a benefit than a flaw, since it allows Acland to work through the full implications of the megaplex and, more generally, to comment at length on contemporary cinemagoing, whose structures and practices are neither stable nor monolithic. The result, I think, is the best work available on post-1980s theatrical film exhibition and a major contribution to our understanding of Hollywood's latest incarnation.

The premise of *Screen Traffic* is that "public film exhibition" is an "ideologically invested" and historically specific "marker of cultural and public life" (95). Passing through the ticket stile at the megaplex, as Acland so ably demonstrates, leads not only to a particular sort of movie experience, but also to a network of interconnected topics that ought to be of great concern to anyone interested in what he calls "the everyday life of popular film culture in our historical situation" (17). And if we aren't interested, we should be. For among the issues, practices, and structures that constitute the "everyday life of popular film culture" we find the evidence and effects of globalization, the "theming" of the commercial entertainment experience, the construction of a transnational public, the shifting relations between distributors and exhibitors, the latest permutations of cross-marketing, and the formative power of industry discourse. How best to make sense of this complex phenomenon? Acland's blend of discourse analysis and cultural studies theory with a judicious use of empirical data and a detailed case study of one site (Canada) proves to be an excellent methodological model.

Part One of *Screen Traffic* sets out to examine nothing less than "contemporary cinema-going" around the globe between 1986 and 1998, the era of the megaplex. Actually, this section is entitled "theorizing contemporary cinema-going," and it fully lives up to its billing. In the process, Acland offers what I find is the most convincing demonstration available of precisely how the theoretical concerns associated with cultural studies are of direct import for the historical study of film exhibition and distribution. "Theorizing," in *Screen Traffic,* is neither taken lightly nor laboriously put on display, nor sprinkled over the text like some exotic garnish. And it is never divorced from the empirical information concerning theater construction, box-office revenue, distribution, and attendance patterns that buttresses the argument of this book.

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Take, for example, the nuanced discussion of globalization, a topic that ought to be near the center of any account of contemporary cinema-going. To demonstrate both the existence and the uneven spread of globalization, Acland makes effective use of quantifiable data (drawn primarily from *Boxoffice*) about shifts in the size and sources of distributor revenues for the domestic (U.S.) and international markets. These hardly self-explanatory numbers—and the industry practices they reflect and inform—have prompted or at least been paralleled by a range of theoretical speculations about the place of national cinemas, the so-called "transparency" of Hollywood's eminently exportable product, the new forms of mobility and mobilized identity, and the persistent threat of cultural imperialism. Working through, contrasting, recombining, and critiquing speculations by Arjun Appadurai, Simon During, Andrew Higson, and others, Acland challenges "a continued impulse toward general models" of the global, which is often understood to be categorically pernicious (37). At the same time, Acland convinces us that "how the global popular is to be read remains a vital project for contemporary cultural theory" (38-9). This move may look a bit like eating (or tossing out) your theoretical cake and having it too, but it is best taken as an acknowledgement that theorizing is not necessarily a matter of constructing "general models."

While globalization is a focal point for cultural theorists, it is at the same time a key topic in industry discourse—those "layers of sedimented images, sounds, ideas, and metaphors" (14) found above all in the trade press, but also in government documents, advertising, and popular magazines. What Acland calls industry "common sense" circulates publicly and comes to constitute a sort of "vernacular understanding" of cinema, cinema-goers, the global, and the public sphere (32). There are "material effects," Acland argues, to the way the industry imagines and understands the behavior and tastes of audiences and, more broadly, the sense it makes of "national culture, global culture, new media, the entertainment business, and leisure pursuits" (14). Inspired by Gramsci and Foucault, Acland makes the analysis of industry discourse the centerpiece of *Screen Traffic,* and in so doing he provides a compelling case for rethinking how scholars use the trade press, a long-privileged primary source in film studies.

Part Two of *Screen Traffic* takes up "structures of cinematic experience," under which rubric Acland examines the relations between exhibitors and distributors that developed during and after the Reagan years. One notable effect of the reversal of the Paramount decree was the superseding (or supersizing) of the mall multiplex by the megaplex, a theatrical venue more suitable for an ever greater dependence on the first-run screening as an opening gambit in the accelerated "life cycle of cultural commodities that extend beyond the cinema site itself" (146). With its array of new, cross-media entertainment options, the megaplex was somewhat akin to the theme park, for it too promised an experience significantly different "from the domestic, from television, from the street, from the shopping mall" (122)—an experience offered in the much-vaunted safety of "controllable public space" (146). The demonstrable, if selective, expansion of urban theater construction outside the United States and the ready availability of "a short-lived but massively visible core of new texts" in the megaplex meant, in the common sense of Hollywood, "an emerging idea of global simultaneity" (160-61).

Shifts in theater ownership, location, design, and entertainment packaging are significant, Acland argues, not because these constrain or enable certain interpretive viewing strategies but because cinemagoing is "part of the patchwork of practices and experiences contributing to senses of neighborhood, civic, national, or transnational cohorts" (20). The public-ness of cinemagoing is therefore absolutely essential, as is the notion of a transnational audience that participates in "zones of global cultural flow" (143).

How does this "international cinema life" register on the ground, in, for example, a place like Canada, where "popular cinema-going . . . consists of an engagement with an internationally circulating popular culture" (170)? Is it a cause for righteous anger or wrenching despair that "a seat in a Canadian theater is essentially a seat in supranational territory" (187)? Instead of bemoaning the absence of Canadian film and holding fast to dreams of a resistant national cinema easily defined in terms of productions made and shown locally, Acland looks closely at the expansion and upgrading of movie theaters in Canada during the megaplex boom years, as well as at government policies, transnational distribution, and the Hollywood visibility of Canadian performers and locations. This case study effectively underscores and exemplifies the broader claims of *Screen Traffic,* while the specificities of "cinema life" in Canada also allow Acland to consider, albeit briefly, the "historical location of Canadian cinema culture in nontheatrical sites," such as schools, festivals, and museums (193).

Canadians, like all people who enter the "supranational territory" of the movie theater, do not thereby give up their citizenship and identity. Acland insists that all cinemagoers maintain "a degree of interpretive freedom" (208) with regard to the texts on screen, to the site itself, and to the very activity of cinema-going. Even in the era of megaplexed globalization, there persists a "complex inter-determination" between a "constraining industrial practice" and "wildly creative patrons" (227). Acland does not attempt to capture this process ethnographically by giving voice to individual viewers or fan subcultures. The screen traffic that concerns him is the "delivery, distribution, and exhibition of film," which not only seeks out and services an audience, but also constructs the "consumer, citizen, fan, and spectator" (230). How airtight or binding is this construction? Does this management of cinema-goers, this "project of stabilization, of making audiences and making—or imagining—them as readable, predictable, and knowable" (50) necessarily entail a leveling of difference? With measured optimism (and with nods to commentators like Ulf Hannerz and Bruce Robbins), Acland finds hope in the prospect that patrons of the megaplex could be said to demonstrate a sort of "popular cosmopolitanism" that offers "a sense of competence with the contemporary and a

connection or empathy with difference" (236), even a "lurching toward a felt internationalism" (243).

You don't have to take this final step with Acland to appreciate the work of *Screen Traffic,* which convincingly demonstrates how much an informed cultural studies perspective can broaden and deepen our understanding of the public experience of cinema-going, the movie theater as social space, the role of industry discourse, and the implications of living in and living with a popular film culture in global circulation.

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Visions of the Apocalypse: Spectacles of Destruction in American Cinema

By Wheeler Winston Dixon. London: Wallflower Press, 2003. $55.00 cloth; $18.95 paper. 169 pages.

Lest the unsuspecting reader be led astray by the title, Wheeler Winston Dixon's *Visions of the Apocalypse: Spectacles of Destruction in American Cinema* offers few in-depth analyses of cinematic depictions of the world's end, and fewer of the films analyzed were produced by American studios. In fact, the two stills that adorn the cover, of New York immediately prior to and during a nuclear onslaught, come from a Japanese film (*Sekai daisenso,* 1961; English title *The Last War*). Such quibbling aside, Dixon takes on grand themes in this slim volume, no less than "the end of cinema, the end of the world, and the end of civilization as we know it" (1).

All of this, Dixon argues, is being brought about by the hyperconglomerization of the film, television, music, and press industries, with the active cooperation of the U.S. military and the passive cooperation of media consumers. Theodor Adorno lurks in the background as Dixon claims that spectators today, without memories of the cultural products that preceded them (half of the films shot before 1950, for example, do not exist, having fallen prey to chemical deterioration and neglect), no longer demand new images. Viewers have not even an inkling that such could exist, but instead remain mired in a kind of scopic adolescence, satisfying their need for entertainment with endless sequels and derivative visuals and narratives. He thus accounts for the latter-day proliferation of blockbuster films based upon comic book characters. Many works that could offer alternative visions, or films that might cast light upon the lives of the historically, politically, or socially marginalized, may never be seen, Dixon maintains, having been deemed unmarketable (hence, unprofitable) by media and entertainment mega-corporations (Rupert Murdoch, AOL Time Warner, et al.) that over the years have acquired rights to them. This control extends not only to films of the past now stored in archives, but also to yet unrealized projects whose philosophical perspectives differ from those prevailing in the media and White House**.** Thus, from the outset, the stalwart film viewer (or music aficionado or news observer) who would escape the endless circulation of recycled images and plot lines (or riffs or viewpoints) has no chance, other voices and visions having been shut out by corporate greed.

And though the advent of DVDs has placed on store shelves many older movies once relegated to obscurity or graduate film seminars, Dixon argues that digitization provides merely the simulacrum of cinematic rebirth. He points out a compelling dilemma in that the transfer of celluloid film to digital format causes the irretrievable loss of the "original viewing experience" (23), especially when one views the work on a television or computer monitor rather than on the silver screen. Such dimensional contraction also denies one the social component of film attendance, as living rooms replace movie theaters. Furthermore, the individual frames of a film, once cleansed of noise and imperfections, no longer possess their uniqueness and historical value as artifacts—the Benjaminian aura, as it were, having been twice removed. Dixon convincingly ties this technological evacuation of authenticity and the human element to the modern tendency in science-fiction and fantasy films to replace live action and actors with computer-generated images. (For further treatment of these matters as well as for examples of some positive aesthetic effects of digital technology upon all aspects of cinema—image capture, grading, and exhibition—one might also refer to Stephen Prince's recent article in *Film Quarterly.*[1])

Dixon weaves the theme of globalization throughout the following three chapters and a coda, examining how rising production costs and corporate interests conspire to restrict the risks that studios are willing to take to make an innovative film and commenting on how media conglomerates use digital technology to prevent incursions of foreign films into the U.S. market. He takes Clear Channel Communications to task for its monopoly on Broadway productions, Oprah Winfrey for the literary influence of her book club, and *Cosmopolitan* magazine for its agenda of sexual colonization on six continents, before offering a digressive encomium to French cinema and auteurism. The author traces the way that Hollywood has reacted to and represented various conflicts since World War II, recounting American society's hapless march toward self-destruction. He argues that both Hollywood and the present administration are complicit in creating and sustaining a state of panic, as recent events bring home apocalyptic fears that feed off heightened terrorist alerts and create a market for films depicting cataclysmic destruction. He concludes that "we are now living in one of the most deeply repressive and conservative eras since Joseph McCarthy first entered the public consciousness" (114).

Dixon's writing style engages, his urgent tone, one imagines, that of the liberated prisoner from Plato's cave returning to his still shackled erstwhile companions to impart the truth about the nature of shadows and reality. Even those not quite old enough to have shared an "original viewing experience" of the films from the 1950s through the 1970s that the author cites will be moved by his passion. Dixon also displays an encyclopedic knowledge of some of the most obscure works and of the latest technological and cinematic trends.

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Yet, too much zeal can sometimes undermine scholarly objectivity. One example: While Dixon is certainly free to characterize the Nixon White House as "an excellent example of the complete lack of integrity in government" (15) and George Bush's policies as ones of "perpetual alarmism" (129), not to mention Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton at all—much less to fail to situate their administrations within the history leading to the "current political climate" (43, 78, 138) of "hysteria and paranoia" (42)—smacks of ideological partisanship. The latter omission is especially odd inasmuch as many of the apocalyptic films that Dixon refers to appeared during the 1990s. The author correctly observes that "if one looks at our shared cinematic past, we can see that we have always been playing with disaster, fascinated by destruction" (132), a comment that prompts one to ask why he places so much emphasis on 9/11 and the Bush administration's reactions to it.

Dixon's book contains 19 stills, though over a dozen of them come from Japanese, Italian, and British disaster films and, bereft of close readings, none advances any particular textual point. The author too often limits his discussion of films to synopses which he reduces toward the end to a mere list of international films based on nuclear destruction. The list does tantalize. One longs to learn more about, among others, *My Mother-in-Law Is an Atomic Bomb* (*Hamati kombola zorria,* 1952), *Canadian Mounties vs. Atomic Invaders* (1953), *The Fiend with the Atomic Brain* (1972; original title *Blood of Ghastly Horror*), and *Class of Nuke 'Em High* (1986), both because they are, as Dixon well argues about such films, difficult if not impossible to find and because they would seem to add a light-hearted dimension to his otherwise serious argument.

Clearly, celluloid Armageddon and the agent of its delivery have, over decades and across borders, assumed many guises that surely have not always signified the same thing. One opines, for example, that *Godzilla* (*Gojira,* 1954), may have helped Japan to come to terms with its own atomic holocaust not ten years earlier, as well as to assert the place of Japanese cinema in the international marketplace (in much the same way that some Weimar films were meant to do for Germany after World War I). But what did the rough beast signify to American audiences when two years later, "its hour come round at last," a modified version of the film was released in the States (poorly dubbed, which now adds to its charm, and with Raymond Burr virtually inserted into the action)? And what cultural need does the monster address in his most recent American role (*Godzilla,* 1998), to speak nothing of his last 27 Japanese incarnations? While all of these subsequent versions may reflect a certain lack of institutional imagination, which would support one of Dixon's theses, what would nuanced and historically informed readings do to reveal subtle differences in the reasons that these films came out when and where they did? Still, whether or not the end really is near, *Visions of the Apocalypse: Spectacles of Destruction in American Cinema* at least prompts one, the book's index (alas, no filmography included) and a video rental card in hand, to broach the question anew.

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DVD REVIEW

Screening Room

By Robert Gardner. Documentary Educational Resources (www.der.org).

Although it is usually assumed that Robert Gardner's greatest accomplishments are his ethnographic films, *Screening Room*, his singular contribution to television innovation and to film education merits parallel inspection. Between 1973 and 1980 Gardner hosted nearly one hundred episodes of a late-night TV talk show that featured filmmakers, artists, and thinkers, and that provided film screenings *on television* of important independent and experimental film. (Disclosure: The author of this review not only watched these programs on television but was also a guest pianist who accompanied silent films when he was one of Gardner's students.)

As a celebrated filmmaker who was also chairman of Harvard's Visual and Environmental Studies Department, Gardner could talk both shop and ideas with fellow filmmakers, educators, and thinkers. His programs provided an "inner view" of his guests that could be biographical or something more profound—revealing previously hidden aspects of an artist's creative process, belief system, or deepest values. Now, over a quarter of a century later, Gardner's *Screening Room* screenings and interviews are being released on DVD by Documentary Educational Resources (www.der.org).

Born during the age of 1970s counter-cultural creativity, *Screening Room* was one of several programs created in an effort to provide alternative television to the greater Boston area by a group of idealistic artists, doctors, lawyers, and teachers who saw an opportunity to transform commercial TV. After years of litigation that even reached the Supreme Court level, the ABC-affiliate WCVB-TV (Channel 5) license was awarded to a new group and *Screening Room* became part of a new wave of commercial television, if only for the moment and at the (late-night) margins of ABC's markets.

Working with TV producer Steve Schlow, Gardner brought four types of guests and their films to television: documentary filmmakers such as Ricky Leacock, Jonas Mekas, and Les Blank; animators such as John Hubley, Caroline Leaf, and Derek Lamb; experimental filmmakers such as

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Working with TV producer Steve Schlow, Gardner brought four types of guests and their films to television: documentary filmmakers such as Ricky Leacock, Jonas Mekas, and Les Blank; animators such as John Hubley, Caroline Leaf, and Derek Lamb; experimental filmmakers such as

Stan Brakhage, Yvonne Rainer, and Robert Fulton; and thinkers/scholars such as Vladimir Petric, Stanley Cavell, Gerald O'Grady, and Rudolf Arnheim. Poet Octavio Paz visited the show to discuss the host's own film, *Dead Birds*; Yugoslav filmmaker Dusan Makaveyev was invited as both fiction and nonfiction creator. Harvard Luce Professor Standish Lawder appeared not only as filmmaker but also as film scholar, sporting a dash of "mad inventor" persona as he showcased his latest mega-gadget—a home-made, mainframe-size "Mr. Wizard"-style optical printer.

Screening Room was probably the first sustained commercially televised presence of nonlinear images and sounds, irrespective of the more conventional talk-show format in which the films were "wrapped." To the drop-in viewer, the program was *on* television, but it was *not* TV: Gardner created an anti-universe of late-night talk—he was not glib, ratings-obsessed, nor humor-driven, and he featured entire films or substantial excerpts, not promos, bloopers, and teases. Within the Robert Breer episode, for example, there are six films (including "Gulls and Boys" and "Fuji"), and a follow-up explication discussion of each film by Breer and Gardner. Breer explains specific animation techniques illustrated by in-studio camera close-ups of flash cards, drawings, and demo props. Given the magic of DVD menus, teachers can show any combination of segments—three Breer films in a row for comparative purposes, one film preceded by Breer's introduction and followed by his technical explication, or even a screening of *Rubber Cement* (1976) followed by Gardner's ethical warnings to the audience about the perils of sniffing glue.

The four types of filmmakers and scholars who were interviewed suggested different modes of programming to Gardner. For example, the episode that combined filmmaker-cum-scholar Lawder with philosopher Cavell may be the most experimental, meaningful, and intellectual 80 minutes of commercial programming on American television. The all but avant-garde program is book-ended by one of Lawder's experimental films shown in two parts, features readings from Cavell's provocative book *The World Viewed*, and exhibits in-process (just back from the lab) experiments in optical printing by Lawder (such as a highly compressed skip-printed version of D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance*) and, of course, his printer, which was transported to and reassembled in the studio.

At the midpoint of Lawder's program, his experimental film *Corridor* (1970), with hybrid melodic-abstract score by Terry Riley, presents the viewer with almost a half hour of relentless optical printing, bi-packing, rhythmic flashing, strobe and solarization effects, and the metaphoric Freudian illusion of entering the female "corridor." We are also treated to Cavell's and Gardner's aperçus about the highly provocative black-and-white *Necrology* (1969): Cavell raises issues of Lawder's artistic impulses, other-awareness, self-awareness, screening ourselves, speculative solitude, and how we view the dead.

Episodes with non-fiction filmmakers are of a different timbre. Although each *Screening Room* visit presents an "inner view" of the artist, Gardner may be at his best evoking the interior landscape of someone like Jean Rouch. Because Rouch's films are much longer than, say, Breer's animations, only substantial excerpts of his *Death of a Priest* (1974) and *Les Maîtres fous* (1954) are shown. At one level we learn about the Dogon and Songhay people of West Africa; at another, about Rouch and his background as anthropologist and engineer (and his role in the New Wave of Truffaut and Godard). We also hear how Rouch's East African "reel world," contrary to naïve perception, became grist for Jean Genet's theater and Peter Brook's *Marat Sade*, and indeed for an anti-colonial theater of the oppressed sometimes perceived as "mad." Again, Gardner universalizes the work with insights about the oppressed within all cultures.

In each episode there are various angles by which we behold an "inner view" of guests and of Gardner. Part of the inner person which emerges is their early pattern of influences—Breer, for example, was inspired by Richter, Duchamp, Leger, Ray, Mondrian, and by the humor embedded within his own Irish heritage. However, there is also a deeper thread of "inner viewing" which occurs. That thread comments on how works of vision may be viewed "from the inside out." Moreover, there is an inside-out revelation about the nature of the creative process and the tempering of ideas in the fire of rethinking and editing. We see an inner view not only of individuals but also of filmmaking, of the artist's compulsion, and finally, to some degree, of humanity.

This is not to suggest that all episodes of *Screening Room* will be all things to all people. Occasionally there are audio level jumps and oral pauses so lengthy one could drive a truck through the dead air. Moreover, there will be those who see Rouch as a bête noir to anti-colonialists, not their champion. And even Gardner, despite his now legendary status and awards, has had critics question his "image ethics." Yet all this is to be expected, and does not diminish the value of the series. Archivists and librarians will find this an excellent illustrated encyclopedia of independent filmmaking technically suitable for the twenty-first century. In addition to the artists already named, Bruce Baillie, Pat O'Neill, Alan Lomax, Jan Lenica, Michael Snow, Ed Emshwiller, Vlatko Gilic, and literally dozens of others appear. (The episodes with Brakhage cannot yet be released due to the wishes of his widow, and it is not certain whether connoisseurs of Robert Nelson will be able to see his work since his program never aired due to sexually explicit material.)

All commercials have been removed from the programs and the DVD menu is organized by episode, listing context for the featured artist, the films screened in that episode, commentaries, and text options such as a written background on the featured director. Viewers can select and replay each film, sequence, or commentary to satisfy their own particular interests. Bibliographic citations are provided; for example, in the Robert Breer DVD, articles by P. Adams Sitney and Scott MacDonald are referenced for further reading.

The "impulse to preserve" (the title of one of Gardner's essays), which has led him to hours of video-to-DVD conversion, also calls to mind over one hundred other creators who have given tirelessly to artistic expansion and to the nourishing of our souls. Within this *Screening Room* are many mansions.

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That megaconglomerates such as Time Warner, Viacom, ABC-Disney, and News Corp. had hijacked the media, subjecting the news to filtration and controlling programming through their television and film subsidiaries, had become an article of faith. This sensation of being enveloped in a world outside of time and being unable to enter the real one, as if it were any different from the world of appearances, is precisely what one felt while watching *The Matrix*. There was an exit from the theater, but was there one from the Matrix, a computer simulation of reality, the same reality that T.S. Eliot claimed that humankind cannot bear? In *The Matrix,* human kind (or rather, the vestiges of the human race) has stubbornly maintained its integrity in the wake of the encroaching machines, taking refuge in Zion—once the promised land above the earth and now, in keeping with the inversion of the natural order in which the Matrix delights, below it. Only a savior can redeem the time and the race. Is it Neo, né Thomas Anderson, found behind a door numbered 101? Clearly *The Matrix* is the Wachowski brothers' PHIL 101, whose required text is Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra & Simulation.* (Baudrillard's prose can get as torturous as Clover's, but on one point he is frighteningly clear: the end of a century, no matter how bloody that century was, induces nostalgia—a yearning for a simpler past, an analog past, and for the Luddites, Smith Coronas instead of Dells.)

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Pinteau, Pascal. *Special Effects: An Oral History*. Trans. by Laurel Hirsch. NY: Harry N. Abrams, 2004. This huge book provides a treasure chest of art work and information on movie special effects from the dawn of cinema to the present day. Pinteau covers traditional techniques of mattes, miniatures, and stop-frame animation, make-up effects that transform an actor's appearance, and contemporary digital work. He discusses the history of each approach and explores specific films through interviews with 38 effects artists, including Ray Harryhausen, Douglas Trumbull, Jim Henson, John

TOM COOPER is a professor at Emerson College in the Department of Visual and Media Arts; he founded, edited and co-published *Media Ethics* magazine, and is the author of five books and over one hundred articles and reviews.

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BOOK NOTES

Contributors to Book Notes: **DEBORAH ALLISON** is a research assistant at City University in London. **RICHARD ARMSTRONG** is an associate tutor affiliated to the British Film Institute. **BERNARD F. DICK** teaches in the School of Art and Media Studies at Fairleigh Dickinson University in Teaneck, N.J. **STEPHEN PRINCE** teaches at Virginia Tech.

Buscombe, Edward. *Unforgiven*. London: BFI Publishing, 2004. $13.95. Buscombe's shrewd analysis of *Unforgiven* challenges an orthodoxy that dominated its critical reception in 1992, namely that the film was defined by the various ways in which it contravened existing generic norms. This widespread perception doubtless played a significant role in its Oscar triumph, as well as helping it to become only the second Western to cross the $100 million mark since Mel Brooks' brassy satire, *Blazing Saddles,* in 1974.

As Buscombe compellingly demonstrates, *Unforgiven*'s accomplishment rests less on a refusal of standard generic models than on its astute fusion of characteristics drawn from a range of earlier Western traditions which it adapts to suit "contemporary sensibilities." His pithy rundown of the genre's longstanding project of adapting itself to shifting ideological frameworks puts this activity in context. If *Unforgiven*'s most obvious antecedents are the deglamorised post-Vietnam Westerns of the 1970s, his survey shows the extent to which it also draws inspiration from the more heroic narratives of the classical era. This gives rise to the paradox by which the film "debunks the mythologized West, but ultimately reasserts the mystique of the hero" in its volte-face climax.

Whilst Buscombe's lively and authoritative account of *Unforgiven*'s generic heritage provides the book's principal critical context, he complements it with an examination of the developing themes and approaches within Clint Eastwood's own career. The interrelation of these contextual frameworks provides an excellent basis for the close analysis that dominates the later sections of the book. His detailed readings of particular characters and incidents are accompanied by views from several of the film's participants as well as a range of commentators. These various perspectives supply a multifaceted critique of a film that palpably reflects upon its own patrimony even whilst it skillfully delivers the very pleasures so intrinsic to the traditions from which it arose.

DEBORAH ALLISON

Clover, Joshua. *The Matrix*. London: BFI Publishing, 2004. $13.95. If *The Matrix* resonated so strongly with audiences in 1999, it was due to a number of factors, as Joshua Clover suggests in his dense, sometimes impenetrable, but always brilliant analysis. As the millennium approached, portents—not always interpretable but keenly felt nonetheless—presaged the end of the old order. Concentration had given way to immersion, as analog yielded to digital. Games that once required human partners were replaced by video gadgetry that, succubus-like, drew the player into its anti-world, so that—to paraphrase W.B. Yeats—if one cannot tell the dancer from the dance, one cannot tell the gamester from the game. In other words, reality had become illusion.

That megaconglomerates such as Time Warner, Viacom, ABC-Disney, and News Corp. had hijacked the media, subjecting the news to filtration and controlling programming through their television and film subsidiaries, had become an article of faith. This sensation of being enveloped in a world outside of time and being unable to enter the real one, as if it were any different from the world of appearances, is precisely what one felt while watching *The Matrix*. There was an exit from the theater, but was there one from the Matrix, a computer simulation of reality, the same reality that T.S. Eliot claimed that humankind cannot bear? In *The Matrix,* human kind (or rather, the vestiges of the human race) has stubbornly maintained its integrity in the wake of the encroaching machines, taking refuge in Zion—once the promised land above the earth and now, in keeping with the inversion of the natural order in which the Matrix delights, below it. Only a savior can redeem the time and the race. Is it Neo, né Thomas Anderson, found behind a door numbered 101? Clearly *The Matrix* is the Wachowski brothers' PHIL 101, whose required text is Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra & Simulation.* (Baudrillard's prose can get as torturous as Clover's, but on one point he is frighteningly clear: the end of a century, no matter how bloody that century was, induces nostalgia—a yearning for a simpler past, an analog past, and for the Luddites, Smith Coronas instead of Dells.)

Since Clover understands *The Matrix* so well, BFI might commission a *Matrix* trilogy edition, so that he can explore the mythic infrastructure of all three films where the characters have emblematic names, and the fractured narratives teem with motifs that seem to have spiraled out of the collective unconscious (the underground city, the subway platform as bridge between two worlds, and the climactic rainbow with its overtones of the rainbow bridge into Valhalla at the end of Wagner's *Rheingold*). The *Matrix* trilogy is not only a cultural phenomenon; it is an academic goldmine.

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Dykstra, Phil Tippett, Stan Winston, and Pitof. The book is handsomely visualized with 1,136 photos and illustrations, nearly all in color. Highly recommended for effects devotees.

STEPHEN PRINCE

Temple, Michael, James S. Williams & Michael Witt, eds. *For Ever Godard*. London: Black Dog Publishing, 2004. $45.00. *For Ever Godard* is derived from the "For Ever Godard" conference at London's Tate Modern in June 2001. Consisting of pieces by scholars and professionals ranging from James Quandt and Colin MacCabe to Nicole Brenez and Adrian Martin, it is a dense, provocative and extremely inviting book.

Whether in the public arena or in his Swiss bunker, Jean-Luc Godard still towers over moving image studies. One of the gifts of conference and book is the attention paid to the diversity of Godard's work. We know about the features, from the interventions of the French New Wave to that bravura reflection on film and memory *Éloge de l'amour* (2001). But this book invites us to catch (if we can) the "fragments," the "letters," "notes," "video scripts," the television work with which Godard has filled his time over the past two decades. Few Godard studies have been so ambitious.

There is an elusive, in-progress feel to this collection that recalls its subject's evolving career. These pieces are torn between the formalist peculiarities of the films, and the philosophical issues they raise. After Part One acknowledges the sheer range of Godard's corpus, Part Two looks for pathways through it. Vinzenz Hediger considers Godard's reinvention of the trailer. Vicki Callahan examines connections between the cinematic and the sacred in *Je vous salue, Marie* (1985) and the 1995 "Self-Portrait" *JLG/JLG*. In the section "Sound and Music," Adrian Martin reviews lyrical interludes in early Godard. Part Four reflects on the nature and ambition of Godard's historiographical project in light of the 1998 essay series *Histoire(s) du cinéma,* a work which has haunted millennial Godard writings. Godard's work here becomes cultural resource and archive. Leslie Hill looks at his special relationship to montage and his use of literary and philosophical citation. Less academic but just as astute are pieces by MacCabe and Quandt on financing *Je vous salue, Marie,* and the quest for useable prints for Quandt's Godard retrospective at the Ontario Cinémathèque.

Few scholarly books work on the coffee table, but this is a sumptuous tome to browse, its filmography thorough, its production imaginative, its insights important.

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